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ABSTRACT

A research study was designed to provide evaluative data to the New Zealand Ministry of Education on models and parts of models that would enhance programs for developing liaison between schools and Pacific Islands parents and communities. Information was collected from 6 clusters of schools, for a total of 38 schools. After initial visits to the schools, return visits were scheduled for focus group interviews of parents, teachers, and school management, and individual interviews with the eight liaison people for these schools. Data provide evidence of the high involvement of parents and teachers and give many examples of effective and successful involvement and involvement programs. Information was gathered about the perceptions of administrators, liaison people, parents, and teachers. A model for promoting parent involvement is developed, and some recommendations are made for future contract development for Pacific Island communities and schools to enhance educational achievement. Two appendixes contain interview questions for the study. (Contains 1 figure and 31 references.) (SLD)

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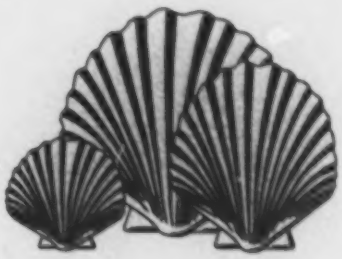
PACIFIC ISLANDS SCHOOL-PARENT-COMMUNITY LIAISON PROJECT

An Independent Evaluation Report



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An Independent Evaluation Report

DIANE L MARA

NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
Wellington
1998

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project was designed to provide evaluative data to the Ministry of Education on models and parts of models which would further enhance programmes for developing liaison between schools and Pacific Islands parents and communities. A related intention was to document descriptions of effective implementation models and processes of school-community liaison. Information was to be collected from schools and their Pacific Islands communities, derived from 6 clusters of schools (being a total of 38 schools).

The 6 clusters of schools were contracted to the Ministry to fulfil the following overall objectives—

- to raise the level of achievement of Pacific Islands students in selected mainstream settings,
- to demonstrate successful methods of raising Pacific Islands student achievement to assist other schools to pursue the same objective,
- to improve liaison with Pacific Islands parents and communities in the schools selected for the programme.

Although each of the 6 clusters had differing objectives and was at different stages of development when data were being collected, the purpose of the independent evaluation was to extract some models or parts of models which would assist other schools to improve their school-community relationships with Pacific Islands parents.

Overseas research studies focusing on models of home-school relationships were reviewed in order to define the kind of model or models which most closely explained the elements of the Pacific Islands Liaison Project. Issues related to home-school differences and attitudes to parent involvement in schools were found to be pertinent, but the overall message was that there were no instant "recipes" for establishing and maintaining positive home-school relationships for schools.

Research in Aotearoa-New Zealand revealed how problematic school-community relationships are where there are differences of language, values, and priorities between home and school. Although it was found that there had been a number of publications circulated to schools by the Ministry of Education and New Zealand researchers, which suggested how schools could build more effective consultation with parents about curriculum development and school governance, these strategies had not really been effectively established by schools with Pacific Islands students. Generally, all schools, including those with Pacific Islands parents, find these processes frustrating and difficult.

The literature does outline some models, but few (with some notable exceptions) include the equivalent of the Pacific Islands liaison person in this project. As a result of this, the researcher developed a proposed model of home-school relationships from the evidence collated from the literature and the data collected in the interviews. Underlying models, such as those of parent empowerment and issues associated with differential levels of power and control, are signalled and more fully explored in the discussion and recommendations section of the report (pp. 37–48).

Data were collected by the researcher through visits and interviews initially to all 6 clusters (in Auckland, Tokoroa, and Wellington). Return visits to clusters were carried out in November and December 1997 for focus group interviews of parents, teachers and school management, and individual interviews with each of the 8 liaison people. The data collected from the responses to

the group and individual questions were collated and analysed separately for groups of parents, teachers and school management, and liaison people. Common issues and themes emerged as analysis proceeded and these are outlined in the results/findings section of the report.

The themes that emerged from the data are listed in order of prevalence and importance across the clusters:

- evidence of the high levels of involvement by parents and teachers in the projects,
- examples of effective and successful involvements,
- perceptions regarding the role of the liaison people,
- perceptions of outcomes for students,
- perceptions of outcomes for parents,
- perceptions of outcomes for teachers and schools,
- developing relationships among parents, teachers, and students,
- project management issues,
- funding issues,
- the nature of the clusters,
- monitoring the objectives,
- time and timing issues,
- reflections and analysis by the liaison people in considering their projects as a whole.

Further issues that are raised in the discussion include monitoring and evaluation; teacher development and support for Pacific Islands teachers in schools; and cultural issues and establishing relationships with Pacific Islands parents.

The discussion interprets evidence from the data with reference to the original research questions. The proposed model is commented on further, focusing on the role of the liaison person, levels of commitment by teachers, students, and parents to home-school relationships, issues of power and control, and a range of external factors and contexts which impinge on the effectiveness of the projects.

The report concludes with some recommendations for future contract development for Pacific Islands communities and schools to enhance educational achievement. It is suggested that future research could explore school-home liaison with Pacific Islands students and their families, using the proposed model.

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Talofa lava! Malo e lelei! Fakalofa lahi atu! Ni sa bula vinaka! Taloha ni! Kia orana! Ia orana! Kia ora koutou katoa!

Greetings and acknowledgments go to the many people who contributed to this report.

To the Pacific Islands parents at the schools involved, to the principals, the teachers, and members of the management committees who contributed their time in interviews and focus groups, I extend my appreciation and grateful thanks for their hospitality, care, and commitment to the Pacific Islands Liaison Project.

I want to make special acknowledgment to all of the liaison people associated with each cluster project. Their initiative, enthusiasm, the special skills they bring to their work, and their care and generosity I hope comes through to the readers of this report.

My thanks also to the members of the Advisory Committee for their crucial contributions at the 2 meetings, one held in 1997 and one in 1998. I particularly appreciated their support in applying for some extra funding from the Ministry of Education that made possible more face-to-face individual and focus group interviewing.

Thanks also to my colleagues in the New Zealand Council for Educational Research: Dr Val Podmore, not only for her overall mentoring but also for her assistance with designing the methodology, planning, and final writing up; Lia Mapa, who assisted ably with data collation and analysis, and secretarial assistance with the Advisory Committee meetings; and Roberta Tiatia, who assisted with word processing and work on the manuscript, and used her Samoan language skills as translator for one of the focus group interviews.

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To each and everyone, thank you for the privilege and opportunity given to me as a Pacific Islands researcher to extend my knowledge and research skills within and on behalf of our Pacific Islands families and their children.

Kia ora! Fakaaue lahi! Malo 'aupito! Kia orana! Soifua! Fa'afetai lava! Māururu!

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In April 1996 a notice in the *Education Gazette* invited schools or clusters of schools with high percentages of Pacific Islands students to submit proposals by 17 June for programmes to enhance home-school liaison with their Pacific Islands parents and communities. By the end of 1996 the Ministry of Education had let contracts with 5 clusters of schools in Auckland, Wellington, and Tokoroa. A sixth cluster located in Auckland was confirmed in the first quarter of 1997.

The clusters were contracted for 1 year to implement their agreed proposal, including a requirement to submit milestone reports during 1997. There was to be a review in the latter part of 1997 to confirm the funding of each of the clusters for a further year, that is until the end of 1998. The clusters were selected to participate according to criteria set by the Ministry (including the percentage of Pacific Islands students) and the nature of the programmes they proposed. In several cases a process of negotiation regarding programmes was necessary prior to the final contract signing.

In February 1997 the Ministry of Education sent out a request for proposals for an independent evaluation of this initiative and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research successfully tendered for the contract. The contract as negotiated was for immediate commencement and to be completed by February 1998.

A fono for the personnel of all the clusters (namely, the principals of the lead schools and the newly appointed liaison people for each cluster) was held in Auckland in April 1997. It was the first opportunity for the group to hear a summary of the results of the student interviews from the AIMHI (achievement in multicultural high schools) research project (1996), completed by Kay Hawke and Jan Hill from Massey University. It was also an opportunity for them to hear about the purpose of the independent evaluation of the Pacific Islands liaison project—the research questions, the proposed methodology, and the parameters of the study planned for 1997 and 1998.

It was important for the assembled group to be fully briefed in person by the researcher because their co-operation in the collection of the data was key to the anticipated outcomes of the evaluation contract. In addition, it was crucial for the researcher to have credibility with both the Pacific Islands liaison people and the principals of the lead schools as they (along with the Pacific Islands parents) were to be the main participants in the study. The researcher herself identifies as a Pacific Islands woman (part-Tahitian) who is not only a trained teacher but who worked between community and schools in Otara in the early 1980s. The presentation at the fono in April set the scene for subsequent visits by the researcher to the individual clusters and to the interviews.

Research Objective

This research project was designed to provide evaluative data to the Ministry of Education on models and parts of models which would enhance further programmes for developing liaison between schools and Pacific Islands parents. Descriptions of effective implementation models and processes in school-community liaison, based on the information collected from schools and community members, were to be derived from evaluating the 6 Pacific Islands liaison projects funded by the Ministry of Education. Each of the 6 clusters of schools set their own specific

objectives; these are summarised in the next section. At the time of the evaluation, clusters were at different stages in implementing their projects. Each had different models they had developed in response to local needs. The overall evaluation seeks to describe models or parts of models from the wide range of initiatives developed by each cluster which could be useful to other schools seeking to liaise effectively with their Pacific Islands parents and communities.

Research Questions

The Ministry of Education requested that the evaluation of the Pacific Islands liaison project address the following research questions which are grouped under 2 sections: the development process and the project itself.

The Development Process

1. How have the schools developed tender documents/proposals for their initiative?
2. What examples of good practice can assist the Ministry in preparing guidelines for schools and their communities tendering for contracts to improve community liaison?

The Project

3. What are the aims and objectives for each contract?
4. What systems do schools have in place to measure whether these objectives have been met?
5. To what extent are schools progressing towards these objectives?
6. Which models, or components of models, have or have not facilitated liaison between schools and their Pacific Islands communities?
7. Are there models, or elements of models, which are particularly effective in facilitating liaison between schools and their communities for the different Pacific Islands groups?
8. Are there any processes that have been particularly helpful in implementing the model, and are there processes that have been ineffective?
9. Are there any changes recommended for enhancing effective delivery of the programmes or for improving liaison between schools and their Pacific Islands communities?
10. What benefits do schools derive, with respect to improving liaison with their Pacific Islands communities, by working in clusters?
11. What disadvantages have schools experienced, with respect to improving liaison with their Pacific Islands communities, by working in clusters?

Aims and Objectives of the Cluster Groups

The 6 clusters of schools (comprising a total of 37 schools) had set themselves a range of aims that they wanted to achieve within the first year of their contracts with the Ministry of Education. On average they had developed about 8 aims per cluster. In the interests of confidentiality, details which identify or evaluate individual clusters are not specified in this report. The following list of elements from clusters is therefore only a summary of the range of initiatives that were included in the separate cluster contracts. Each cluster had a mix of initiatives, but essentially all projects aimed to raise the level of Pacific Islands students' achievement and self-esteem. The aims

are grouped under school, parent/family, and the project itself to show that the clusters saw all these elements as important.

Aims for Schools

- Investigate and assess barriers to effective learning and develop strategies to overcome them.
- Develop and maintain within schools their own records on their progress towards removing barriers to learning for Pacific Islands students.
- Develop long-term effective and creative strategies to improve achievement of Pacific Islands students.
- Improve the relationships between the teachers and the students within the schools.
- Develop materials and resources and implement professional development for teachers and other staff about the importance of cultural background and the learning strategies of Pacific Islands students.
- Establish and maintain "study clinics" (homework centres) to be supported by past and other Pacific Islands students, including university students.
- Include items in Pacific Islands languages in school newsletters about the project and achievements of students with the intention of keeping Pacific Islands parents informed.
- Produce a booklet for Pacific Islands parents explaining all aspects of New Zealand secondary schooling, the role of parent support, and how parents can access the schools their children attend. The booklet should be produced in Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Māori, and the Niuean languages.
- Liaise with other school and community initiatives, including health agencies, aimed at assisting Pacific Islands students in schools.
- Develop an academic and community leadership programme which focuses on writing, counselling, and mentoring and which helps students to learn, helps families to support students through closer school links and information provided by the Pacific Islands liaison person, and involves "successful" members of the Pacific Islands communities to act as mentors to students.

Aims for Families/Parents

- Promote and strengthen Pacific Islands families' participation and partnership in schools and the progress of their children at school.
- Organise and hold parent meetings to inform them of their children's learning and about the aims and objectives of the project.
- Support parents as educators in the home, and develop among parents a greater understanding of the kinds of assistance they can give to their children.
- Actively initiate and provide a drive for literacy and total language enrichment through the "Books in Homes" scheme and through teaching reading involvement with family members to help students in the home to build on their oral language strengths.

Aims for the Project Itself

- Examine the concept and prepare a report on the viability of a community liaison officer for each school or cluster of schools.
- Promote the Pacific Islands liaison project and its achievements as they develop.
- Work towards preparing a suitable person to continue liaison work between schools and parents to promote understanding and support for all.

Although the aims are summarised and grouped separately, in practice these interacted to form a cohesive initiative. This evaluation was unable to describe a clear picture of this interaction due to the short time the projects had been running.

A general comment about the number and extent of each cluster's aims is that after a period of about 8 months into their projects (at the time when the parents and teachers were being interviewed) a number of clusters reported that they had probably negotiated too many aims and objectives. Consequently, in planning for a subsequent year they would be considering narrowing their focus on to specific curriculum areas, with the intention of being more effective in meeting their objective of raising achievement for their Pacific Islands students. The cluster that felt most satisfied with the outcomes thus far had focused most of their teachers' and liaison person's time on a mentoring programme in a curriculum area, in order to meet their wider aims and objectives.

The Organisational Structures of the Cluster Groups

Every cluster had a lead school which was the main contractor to the Ministry on behalf of the other schools in the cluster.

The lead school convened a management committee, which administered and co-ordinated the project and employed a Pacific Islands liaison person (or 2 persons in 2 cases). The composition of the management committees varied but most had all the school principals (or their representative) on the committee; in addition some had teachers who were directly involved with the project, and a couple of clusters had parent representatives as well on the committee. One cluster which had no parent representatives on the management committee at the time of interviewing reported they were moving towards inviting them on but in the transition they were setting up ethnic subcommittees which would support the work of the liaison person.

Structure and management issues which emerged through the interview process will be discussed in later sections of the report.

Associated Initiatives

Alongside the Pacific Islands liaison project there was provision for professional development for Pacific Islands teachers in the cluster schools run under contract from the Ministry of Education by Ms Lily Tuioti. She also acted as mentor to the liaison people employed in the clusters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background to the Study

The Pacific Islands School-Parent-Community Liaison (PISPCL) Project is one of a number of initiatives that comes within the *Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika*, outlined as the Pacific Islands people's education plan, which was launched by the Ministry of Education in December 1996. Aimed at primary and secondary education it comes within a group of initiatives which have as their overall goal:

> To support and carry out initiatives that will raise the achievement levels of Pacific Islands students in the essential learning areas. (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p. 16)

There exists an underlying assumption that the achievement levels of Pacific Islands students in primary and secondary schools will be raised if home-school relationships are improved between Pacific Islands parents/families/communities through interventions designed by the schools themselves, in clusters. The purpose of this independent evaluation was to attempt to describe some models of that relationship for schools and their Pacific Islands parents and students, rather than to demonstrate the relationship between parent-school liaison and achievement levels of Pacific Islands students *per se*. The positives that are emerging from clusters (within the short time since their establishment) have yet to be shown to have an effect on Pacific Islands student achievement. The literature does not, nor can it, provide "recipes" that would apply for all schools, let alone particular aid to schools attempting to liaise more effectively with their Pacific Islands parents.

Any "effective" models that are developed in New Zealand must exist within the bounds of their own historical context (for example, the history of parent-school liaison to date); the political and policy context (for example, the devolution of management to individual boards of trustees); the socioeconomic contexts of the Pacific Islands communities; and, just as importantly, the levels of funding and resourcing available to schools with high proportions of Pacific Islands students.

The middle-class nature of the values, attitudes, and expectations of the schooling systems in most Western countries is well documented. The challenge for minority ethnic groups is how to succeed when a mismatch exists between the values and priorities of the home and those of the school. Research findings are variable about how successfully ethnic minority groups can compete and achieve in the light of such obstacles. The social reproduction role of schools is also prominent in the literature on school achievement and academic success. In other words, schools efficiently reproduce the inequalities in society rather than change them although that process does not occur in a smooth and uncontested manner (for example, Henry, Knight, Lingard, & Taylor, 1988, p. 13).

The home-school liaison relationship is characterised by 3 parties—parents, students, and teachers, all grappling with a partnership in which the parties are not in the same situation. These do not exercise the same degree of power or control in terms of decision making and influence over schooling and curriculum for students. We need to ask the questions, therefore, in relation to this project about what is actually realistic in terms of the levels of awareness of Pacific Islands parents and the nature of parent-student-teacher relationships and decision making that will make a positive difference in the achievement levels of Pacific Islands students.

Overseas Research

There are no "recipes" either that can be derived from overseas research. Lareau and Shumar (1996, p. 36) argue there is still no systematic evaluation of the outcomes of home-school liaison programmes "such as comparing a matched group of participants and non-participants and showing the consequences for educational achievement". There are no studies, they claim, that clearly demonstrate the link between specific practices in terms of home-school partnerships to specific outcomes. Despite the aforementioned critique by Lareau and Shumar (1996), in their discussion they examine some conditions under which forging family-school relationships can be a "valuable and positive force in shaping children's achievement in school". These will be considered later in the discussion of models.

Research which considers social class differences between the values and resources of the home and the school has some relevance to Pacific Islands peoples in New Zealand because their populations have lower levels of income and figure disproportionately highly in unemployment statistics. The ways in which Pacific Islands parents and families relate to schools, their expectations of teachers, and teachers' views of parents require some closer analysis. Lareau (1987) in her qualitative study of family-school relationships in white working-class and middle-class communities in Illinois, argues that there are characteristics of family life that intervene and mediate in family-school relationships.

Further, there are social and cultural elements of family life that can facilitate compliance with teachers' requests which she believes can be viewed as a form of "cultural capital". Lareau looked at 2 questions in her study: "What do schools ask of their parents?" (in elementary schooling) and "How do parents respond to schools' requests?". She wanted to find out how the social class position of families influenced the process through which parents get to participate in their children's schooling. We need to be aware, writes Lareau, that an acceptance of a concept of family-school relationships emerging as the result of social processes, is key to attempting to describe and analyse these relationships. The concept of school-family relationships in Lareau's study of 2 kinds of schools showed that the same definition of an "ideal" relationship between home and school was held by both types of schools (that is, teachers and administrators in both middle-class and working-class schools).

> Teachers and administrators talked of being 'partners' with parents, and they stressed the need to maintain communication, but it was clear that they desired parents to defer to their professional expertise. (Lareau, 1987, p. 76)

Some of the teachers in both types of schools were still ambivalent about parent involvement and Lareau found examples where teachers varied in their judgments of parents as being "interfering" or "disinterested" in their child's education. All teachers operated on the assumption that parents would help their children at home, at least with reading; would read the newsletters sent home via the pupils; and would communicate at any time if they had concerns for their children's progress. It seems that where families shared the same assumptions or ideals and were able to comply with school assumptions and requests, whatever background of experiences their children brought to school, such shared ideals turn into a form of "cultural capital", writes Lareau, which helps children to achieve at higher levels at school.

When families cannot comply with school requests (as in the case of many working-class

families) for whatever reasons, be they their own educational capabilities, their view of the appropriate division of labour between teachers and parents, the information they have received about their children's schooling, and the time/money/material resources of the family, then the home-school relationship becomes an "unequal" partnership. The other problem is that teachers tend to judge parent interest in their child's education by their level of "compliance/non-compliance" and their level of "involvement/non-involvement".

The main points made by Lareau have relevance to our thinking about the Pacific Islands liaison project because there is not only the social class mismatch but also a cultural mismatch and overlaps of them both. As Lareau argues, more research is needed on the actual processes whereby home-school relationships are critical links in the process of social reproduction of the social inequalities. As yet, Lareau claims, little is known internationally about the stages of this process. Possibly even less is known in Aotearoa-New Zealand in reference to Pacific Islands students, apart from some of the recent work by Nash and Major (1995, 1996) and Jones (1992). Nash's and Major's studies of conversations with sixth form students (including Pacific Islands students) closely document and comment upon peer friendships, parents' attitudes and expectations, school and teacher expectations, and how students cope with the often conflicting demands of home and school. Jones's (1992) ethnographic study in a girls' secondary school describes how social class differences impact upon the classroom teaching and learning to the extent that Pacific Islands girls are experiencing what she described as "symbolic violence" at school in respect of the values, language, and priorities brought from home. In this way Jones shows social class inequalities are simply reinforced by the school and classroom teaching. If indeed we want to investigate further whether interventions such as the Pacific Islands liaison project contribute to higher academic achievement levels, and thereby address present social inequalities for members of Pacific Islands groups in New Zealand, a follow-up study of this cohort in the projects would be necessary.

Research in Aotearoa-New Zealand

A number of important studies in the field of home-school relationships have been completed in Aotearoa-New Zealand dating back to Ramsay, Probine, Snedden, Grenfell, and Ford (1981), through to Levett and Lankshear (1990); Levett, Lankshear, and Crothers, (1991); Timperley, McNaughton, Parr, and Robinson (1992); Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriott, and Poskitt (1993); and Wylie (1994). The latter Ramsay (1993) study concerned collaboration between home and school in curriculum development and was published by the Ministry of Education as *Developing Partnerships: Collaboration Between Teachers and Parents*. This publication covers the range of important issues in home-school liaison and needs to be "rediscovered" and possibly extended by the schools and clusters of schools in the Pacific Islands liaison project. It outlines a process of partnership development between home and school, in the area of curriculum development, and the roles principals, teachers, parents, and students need to play in order to effect positive change. The resources required, the school system itself, and shared decision-making processes are all illuminated by specific examples from the 28 schools in their study. The study has added much to the literature by giving schools and teachers guidelines on home-school liaison, but the question needs to be asked why are these positive models not yet widespread and deeply rooted in the workings of the schools surveyed?

Wylie (1994) in her article "The Too Hard Basket? Closing the Gap Between Parents and

Teachers" goes some way towards answering why parents and teachers have very different perceptions of the teacher's role and what is seen as important or useful in children's learning. Such differences in perceptions could account for the seeming lack of "progress" in the development of home-school relationships in our education system. Wylie examines the sources of information that parents base their understandings on about what happens at school and how their children are progressing. She looked at how teachers perceive the role of parents, and her research revealed an ambiguity amongst teachers: on the one hand welcoming parents' support in terms of reading at home, helping with homework, contacting the school with information or concerns about their child, while on the other hand sometimes concerned about parental practices perhaps undermining what they, the teachers, are trying to achieve at school.

Even when teachers have realised the importance of facilitating a better flow of information and have created more (and varied) opportunities to involve or get alongside parents, the very parents they wish to involve are the ones who do not seem to participate. Wylie writes that frustrated attempts in the past have more than likely relegated this aspect of teacher and school responsibility to children into the "too hard basket", but she warns that, with greater devolution in our education system, now more than ever schools will need to meet the challenge of improving their home-school relationships.

The strength of the Levett, Lankshear, and Crothers (1991) study is that it reports some public perceptions (from interviews with parents) about secondary schooling in New Zealand. The authors found that parents do not favour a narrow focus for schools in terms of subjects or social composition of students. Parents over all held 2 distinct views: that we live in a multicultural society and it is a tough world out there, so students have to be prepared for living with diversity and gaining qualifications. Levett et al. (1991) found that parents viewed schools

> . . . as a repository of hopes about upward mobility; they are to provide opportunity for everyone to succeed. Therefore each school's curriculum should offer the widest possible opportunity for students to succeed. (1991, p. 33)

In addition parents saw the key to "desirable education" as "good teachers—who care about the students—and experienced capable principals". Hawk and Hill (1996) found similar views in the AIMHI schools about good, caring teachers.

Levett et al. (1991) demonstrate, as does Wylie (1994), the gaps that exist between secondary teachers and parents/communities and the differences in how they think desirable educational goals can be achieved. They cite social class differences, ethnicity, and educational backgrounds of parents and teachers as important factors informing their respective views. In addition their study showed a difference in priorities of school subjects they think their children should take. In such circumstances of differences Levett et al. (1991) write:

> Teachers need not think that public opinion is an intrusion upon or challenge to their professional competence and integrity. Our impression is that parents, and the public more generally, want to have a say but do not seek control. (1991, p. 35)

Timperley et al. (1992) also found a level of frustration by principals, teachers, and boards of trustee members with parent involvement which was accompanied by a perception about parents who either "don't care" or are "apathetic". They also highlighted language and cultural differences as barriers to communication with parents. Their study revealed a high level of effort by schools

to develop relationships with parents with limited outcomes or benefits. Some schools interviewed espoused, to the researchers, openness and equality of partnership with parents but, in actual fact, in practice did not implement this. A further group of principals in their study said they often made decisions independently where parents had restricted access to information and influence. Such findings confirm Wylie's statement that some New Zealand schools place thorough-going home-school partnerships in the "too hard basket".

Models of School-Parent-Community Liaison from the Literature

Most models of home-school relationships depict them as an interacting triad or triangular relationship between home (parents), school (teachers), and students (including Ramsay et al. (1981), through to Levett and Lankshear (1990); Levett, Lankshear, and Crothers, (1991); Timperley et al. (1992); Ramsay et al. (1993); Wylie (1994); Chrispeels, (1996); Coleman, Collinge and Tabin (1996); and Hawk and Hill (1996).

In the case of the Pacific Islands School-Parent-Community Liaison Project this relationship, or set of relationships in respect of each school in every cluster, is facilitated by one or two Pacific Islands liaison people. Most importantly, funding has been allocated to pay these liaison people so that they can focus solely on this role. This is a distinctive feature of this project not specifically referred to in many other models found in the literature.

There are several articles that may be pertinent to the development of models of home-school relationships in New Zealand. Janet Chrispeels (1996) argues for drawing attention to the parallels between effective school characteristics and family practices as a framework for developing home-school relationships. She stresses the need for teachers to feel competent to teach all students so that they can go beyond negative stereotypes and form partnerships with parents.

In a number of studies the role of the school and teachers and their ability (and desires) to take the initiative are crucial to the building of relationships with parents.

In the literature there is mention of a parent involvement model or, as McGaw, Piper, Banks, and Evans (1992) describe in their Australian study *Making Schools More Effective*, a principle of parent involvement. One of the key statements from their chapter on parents in effective schools seems relevant here:

> If parents feel important in the education process, they can be a great backup and support for teachers' efforts—thus they need to be constantly involved in the life of the school. (1992, p. 92)

Schools, however, need to initiate and encourage parents to feel welcome and "important".

In their interviews, liaison people reported that they could get parents interested in their children's schools, but the principals and teachers had to make the effort to include the parents in a range of meaningful ways in their child's learning if positive relationships were to develop. Initiatives such as homework centres where parents and teachers help out are examples of joint activities which build relationships. The conceptual model developed by Chrispeels looks to be highly relevant to the Pacific Islands liaison project. The elements of her model must work in both directions between school, parents, and community. These elements are:

- raise parents' expectations through communication and information,
- use parent workshops to focus on academics (curriculum and learning),

- provide frequent reports of pupil progress,
- invite/structure home-school relations that respect cultural diversity, and involve all,
- extend learning time with homework, after-school programmes, family workshops,
- give recognition for academic growth and achievement, and
- develop parents as leaders. (Chrispeels, 1996, p. 307)

These are also elements which demonstrate how effective school practices are being implemented. Thus Chrispeels argues that school effectiveness can be assessed by schools themselves to "audit" their own programmes in home-school relationships.

Chrispeels warns that school staff need to see the development of a strong home-school-community partnership as being a 3- to 5-year process and not to expect a "quick-fix" solution. She also makes the point that there is much value for schools and teachers in struggling through the process with parents and communities in order to create new roles and relationships that are appropriate to them.

For everyone concerned, Chrispeels writes, a "no-fault philosophy" should prevail where no one partner is to blame for student "failure", each one accepting they cannot find the solutions alone but need to support each other. Teacher support and development is therefore crucial to help them work effectively with parents, and teacher involvement in action research in this area would assist schools to rethink and restructure their partnerships with parents, according to Chrispeels.

Rutherford and Billig (1995) summarised their research findings on parent, family, and community development in the "Middle Grades" (students aged from 12 to 15 years of age) into a list of 8 "lessons" as follows:

1. The stakes are high and immediate for everyone in the middle grades.
2. Challenges can become opportunities for parent/family involvement.
3. Relationships are the essence of middle grade family and community development.
4. Responsibility and decision making are shared by a broad array of players, including the child.
5. Sustained parent/family involvement and community involvement depend on active advocacy by leaders.
6. A system of supports for front-line workers is critical to parent/family involvement.
7. Families need connections to the curriculum.
8. Schools need connections to the community.

(Summarised from Rutherford and Billig, 1995, pp. 65–68)

Joyce Epstein (1995) has developed a framework of 6 types of parent-school involvements and some sample (related) practices. The "types" or categories are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. She shows how through a process of facing challenges, and redefining these "types", schools can plan for outcomes for students, parents, and teachers. In line with other researchers, she stresses that a period of time is needed for the process to be worked through in order to make progress and ensure staff development. She also describes a "core of caring", based on mutual trust and respect, as underpinning relationships between home and school.

Coleman et al. (1996), in their study of collaborative attitudes and activities between home and

school at both class and school-wide level, have developed qualitative scales to measure such dependent variables as school climate and parent and student ratings of "satisfaction" with schools. They write about the importance of finding evidence of "successful bonding" between the student and the school that is vital to later success. Their model of analysis includes parent-student, teacher-student, and parent-teacher collaboration.

The principal in each school has considerable influence on the quality and range of relationships established with Pacific Islands parents and the communities. Goldring and Shapira (1996) considered the ways in which principals work with parents in schools that have a shared, consistent mission. Looking across 4 very different school types as case studies they concluded that principal-parent interactions are the result of unique processes in each school which are negotiated and institutionalised over time. Newly appointed principals in any school have to establish their credibility and status within the school community. Pacific Islands parents' perceptions of the principal as a person of very high status set up corresponding expectations for any principal who wishes to establish positive home-school relationships with Pacific Islands communities and individuals. Factors such as the principal's own interpersonal skills and knowledge both of the area and of parents' views play a vital role in facilitating home-school relationships.

Implication of the Literature Review for a Model/s for Home-School-Community Partnership

A number of difficulties presented themselves towards the end of this project when it came to a consideration of a model or models, because of the diversity of the clusters and the many variables existing across the schools and clusters. In the light of the literature review, the liaison projects themselves, while reflecting elements of models developed in the literature, still appeared to be at early stages of their development.

At the commencement of the independent evaluation, each cluster was also at different stages of its development in terms of its history (and success) of Pacific Islands parental involvement in schools. During 1996 there were already a number of priorities to which these schools were responding, such as staffing levels, and issues of funding, resourcing, and management, prior to the establishment of the liaison project. Such diverse factors as these needed to be taken into account when attempting to extract models from the implementation of this initiative. Other factors relating to the size and nature of each cluster, such as the variable levels nature of the schools (combinations of primary through to secondary) and the differences in philosophy (that is, whether state integrated or not) must also be taken into account. Historically, parental involvement is usually highest when their children first enter school and then becomes less frequent as children move up into the higher classes/year levels. It could be argued that each of the initiatives themselves, as outlined in the aims and objectives of each cluster, are "models". However, if the purpose of this report is to assist schools outside the liaison funding initiative, who have Pacific Islands students and are looking for ways to improve their relationships with their parents and communities, some context and an overall model seemed to be more useful.

For these reasons the researcher developed a proposed model, based on some models from the literature but incorporating features peculiar to the Pacific Islands liaison project. This model is fully described in the discussion section of this report (pp. 42–47).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

There were 2 initial challenges posed in relation to the development of the methodology required for this study. The Ministry had already framed the 11 research questions in the proposal (see previous section) upon which a methodology had to be designed.

Secondly, the clusters themselves provided a challenge of their own. Each cluster had developed a range of aims and objectives; and the levels of schooling varied—some clusters contained only secondary schools, some contained primary, secondary, and intermediate schools. In addition, some clusters contained state and state integrated schools, another exclusively state integrated schools at a range of levels. It soon became evident that we were faced with a range of variables from which to derive models or parts of models and that any methodology had to take this diversity into account.

A further important consideration in developing the methodology was of course the financial one. With 3 clusters in Auckland, a large one in Tokoroa, and 2 in Wellington, travel (on at least one occasion) to the individual clusters was necessary. The funding also limited us, initially, to consider written questionnaires and telephone interviews as the main method of collecting data to answer the research questions. Since we were conducting research with the Pacific Islands communities it was recommended that a more face-to-face approach would not only be more appropriate but would assist in the collection of more accurate data about how the different projects were going. Fortunately, during the course of the study a further method of collecting data was approved and extra funding was granted for this purpose. The methodology is outlined in the following section.

Data Collection Methods

The following were the methods initially designed to collect data to answer the research questions:

1. *Initial cluster visits* to the lead schools. The purpose of the visit was to make local contact and interview the principals, teachers, and liaison people about the first 3 research questions; to study the process of developing their proposals to the Ministry of Education; and to gauge their initial reactions to working in clusters of schools to develop home-school relationships with their Pacific Islands parents. The visit also included a confirmation of their aims and objectives as had been recorded at the Ministry of Education.

2. *Written questionnaires* to Pacific Islands parents. The purpose was to find out to what extent having the liaison project had assisted both their own children and their involvement in their child's schooling. Data gathered would assist with answering research questions 3 to 11.

3. *Telephone interviews* with the liaison people in all of the clusters. The purpose was to ascertain their roles as facilitators of community/home-school relationships; the kinds of activities or approaches they had set up; their opinions of the process thus far; and their views of the future. For those liaison people who were job-sharing, data were to be collected about their working together as a team, and the advantages and disadvantages. (This method was replaced by focus group interviews.)

4. *Other sources of information.* In addition, the researcher had access to the Ministry of Education files on the policy initiative and the selection process up to and including the final contract documents with each cluster; was included in the teleconference network with the liaison people; and had access to the milestone reports supplied by each cluster to the Ministry of Education. The researcher encouraged liaison people to telephone or communi- cate if they wished to discuss any issue with her as an "outside/uninvolved" person. Several did so.

5. *Literature review.* References from Aotearoa-New Zealand were sought as well as relevant overseas studies. There is a great deal of research on home-school relationships, and the search for this study focused more on overviews of models, some sociological critique, and school effectiveness research. The New Zealand studies were selected on the basis of school-based research and of particular relevance is the recent study *Towards Making Achieving Cool: Achievement in Multicultural High Schools (AIMHI)* by Kay Hawk and Jan Hill (1996). Chapter 7 on "Student Influences" in that report substantially fills out gaps on students' own data and therefore should be read in conjunction with this. Chapter 6 in their report on "Parent/ Family/Community Influences" is important as background study as well as chapter 10 on Pacific parents' perspectives.

The Process of Data Collection

During May 1997 the initial visits to the clusters were made. Interviews were held with the lead school principals, the liaison person, and in some cases the school staff members and parent representative on the cluster management committee. In one instance the visit coincided with a management meeting to which the researcher was invited and this gave another insight into that project.

The first visit focused on the 3 initial questions posed by the Ministry. These questions mainly related to the contracting process the clusters had entered into with the Ministry, and their responses form feedback to the Ministry to improve their own processes.

In August the Advisory Committee to the Independent Evaluation contract met to receive the first round of results and examine the proposed methodology (a written questionnaire and telephone interviews) for the next stage of the study. The Advisory Committee unanimously endorsed our suggestion that, instead of sending out questionnaires to parents and teachers and conducting interviews on the telephone with the liaison people, we should carry out face-to-face focus group interviews with parents and teachers/principals/school management, and individual face-to-face interviews with the liaison people.

Additional funding had to be sought from the Ministry of Education which made available funding for *focus group interviews* (separate parents and teacher/school management groups) to be held in 4 of the 6 clusters and personal interviews with all the 8 liaison people. (Two of the clusters employ 2 liaison workers.)

Rationale for Focus Group Interviews

Kreuger (1988) sets out suggestions for using focus groups as a tool for collecting qualitative data. Wilson (1997) draws together the work of Kreuger and others to show what focus groups are and how they have been utilised by researchers, and outlines some practical and theoretical

implications on data generation when focus groups are employed in educational research. A number of points raised by Wilson inform the reasons for choosing this approach to gather data on the Pacific Islands liaison project from both teachers/school management and Pacific Islands parents.

A focus group interview is more than just a group interviewing of individuals together. Focus groups are convened to create a non-threatening environment where people can share their ideas and explore their feelings, perceptions, and attitudes. A focus group approach attempts to encourage and utilise group interactions and is useful, according to Watts and Ebbutt (1987), where a group of people have been working together for some time for a common purpose. Both features certainly applied to this project and in addition it was important for there to be separate parent and teacher focus groups to allow free expression of views from both perspectives.

The choice of focus groups for working with Pacific Islands (mostly Samoan) parents is confirmed by Tamasese, Peteru, and Waldegrave (1997) in their study of mental health issues in the Samoan community. They reported that they selected a focus group approach because it most closely matched the communal values of Samoan people and because it allowed a depth of discussion around the key topics of the research. They went further, however, in that they structured their groups by gender, age seniority, and employment, mirroring institutional structures within Samoan communities.

The researcher and facilitator of all the focus groups in this study experienced what Watts and Ebbutt describe as being in the situation to "read" interactions, realising who contributed often or not at all. It was not always possible to be "in control" of the process where there were side conversations in the Samoan language, for example, or where in one case a community person sat through all the focus groups to say an opening prayer and give spiritual support through the process. However, the researcher's role was to lead the group through the questions, encourage, accept contributions, record them on charts or a white board, and feed them back to the group members as the group's view.

Being present for all the focus group interviews also assisted when the interpretation and collation of all the responses to the questions needed to be done. A range of views was gathered through this process, and being able to remember the group dynamics and the "non-verbal" context was important in conveying the meaning or intention behind comments particularly when, for many members of the parent groups, English is not their first language.

The final comments on the suitability of this methodological approach centre around the role of the researcher. The focus group approach is a challenging one which requires a great deal of energy and concentration to facilitate well and to elicit reactions and responses. However, for this project this methodology was worthwhile for the wealth of information it gathered in a relatively short timeframe and was much more personal and interactive for the teachers and the Pacific Islands parents than the planned written questionnaire.

Cluster Focus Group Interviews

During September, October, and November 1997 all 6 clusters were visited to interview the liaison people and 4 clusters to conduct 2 groups of Pacific Islands parents and 2 groups of teachers at each cluster (16 groups in total, averaging 6–8 members in each group). The criteria for the selection for membership (developed by the Advisory Committee) were communicated to the

liaison people at the 4 sites and they were asked to do their best to meet these, given local conditions. Liaison people were asked to set up the groups, and arrange the venues and times with the researcher.

The criteria for focus group members were as follows: focus group members (Pacific Islands parents and teachers in the school clusters) had to be involved somehow with the programmes liaison people had set up in their cluster. As far as possible we asked if all schools in the cluster could be represented (difficult for the largest cluster of 11 schools); and, if possible the parents should be representative of the main ethnic groups in the cluster schools.

The reason for interviewing those more closely involved (either directly or through their students) within each cluster related to the fact that the requirement of the study was not primarily to evaluate each cluster (which had to monitor its own outcomes and meet agreed milestones in its contract), but to extract some models out of the current projects that could be shared with other schools with Pacific Islands students, parents, and communities.

It was appropriate to insist upon face-to-face interviews for the second phase of the evaluation rather than postal questionnaires because it was very likely our Pacific Islands parents would prefer personal interaction and the giving of information orally rather than in written form. It was more likely the researcher would hear a fuller account if time was available to discuss, talk around, and share with other parents. We anticipated parents would want to use their own language and in one instance we supplied a fluent Samoan speaker (with the group's permission) to sit in on the focus group discussion. Parents in this case also translated for each other, and opinions were shared and recorded in that way.

The 15 focus group questions were derived from the remaining 7 research questions developed by the Ministry, as were the questions for the liaison people. With most groups their responses to the 15 questions were written up in English, either on a white board or paper charts which meant they could read their responses and ask for any of their comments to be removed before the final record was made—either directly on to a laptop by a research recorder/assistant or the charts were taken back to the office and typed up after approval from the group.

The dynamics of the focus group interviews for the parents warrant mention because we always started with a prayer, and food was offered in most cases because interviews were mostly in the evenings (food usually following the interview and preceded by the saying of grace). As previously mentioned, at one venue when 4 groups were interviewed over 2 evenings, parent and teacher interviews alternating, a Samoan parent, who is also a lay preacher and community worker, sat through all 4 groups supplying spiritual support which was gratefully received by all.

In large part, the membership of the teacher/school management focus groups included principals in the cluster (or their representatives) and teaching staff directly involved with the projects in their schools. One group consisted of all (bar one) of the Pacific Islands teachers in that cluster.

Liaison Interviews

The 6 liaison interviews were carried out during the time spent at each of the 4 clusters involved in the focus group interviews. Separate visits were made to the remaining 2 cluster liaison people.

The interview questions were aimed at gaining a picture of the liaison people's own perspectives of their role, their achievements and their insights after about 8 months (or less) in

their jobs. In 2 cases where clusters had appointed 2 liaison people, they were interviewed individually, and then together. The second paired interview centred on how tasks and skills were divided up between them and what was important about having a partner in this kind of work. The liaison people were asked about issues to do with their management and support in terms of how they were assisted to fulfil the requirements of their jobs.

Timing of Visits and Interviews

The focus group interviews and the liaison interviews were conducted over November and December 1997. This was the period during which projects were awaiting word from the Ministry about whether funding for 1998 was approved. Despite assurances that the independent evaluation stood outside this process and had no influence on funding or on the ongoing employment of the liaison people, the responses from the participants in this study need to be interpreted in the light of this timing.

Analysis of Cluster Focus Groups and Liaison Interviews

The focus group transcripts were collated and coded separately for groups of parents, groups of teachers and management, and liaison people.

The researcher (and a research assistant) read all of the material recorded from the interviews. The focus group notes and interview transcripts were then coded and collated separately for groups of parents, teachers/school management, and liaison people. Within these sample groups, the responses to each of the 15 questions were coded and then sorted and listed in order of frequency across the focus groups. These collated responses were summarised, and then the main themes were extracted. The findings presented in the next section are organised in accordance with the main themes.

It needs to be noted that the parent and teachers groups answered the same questions, with some slight variation due to their specific involvement. They were also asked about their perspectives of the other group (teachers about parents, and parents about teachers). Differences and similarities between the findings for the parents and the teachers/management are summarised in a subsequent section of the results, and illustrated with excerpts from the participants' recorded and approved comments.

In the discussion section, these findings are interpreted further in the context of the Ministry of Education's research questions and in relation to the research literature.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Initial Cluster Visits

The initial visits to clusters in May 1996 sought responses from the lead schools about how the process of tendering had proceeded.

Processes for Developing Tender Proposal

Each cluster varied in its approaches after reading the initial *Education Gazette* notice of 22 April (Ministry of Education, 1996a). Broadly the sequence of events fell into the following steps:

1. The consultation process with other schools and the communities.
2. The development of the proposals and liaison with the Ministry.
3. The process leading up to the confirmation of the contract with the Ministry.
4. The development of the advertisement and job descriptions for the liaison staff.
5. The appointment of the liaison staff.

All clusters mentioned tight timeframes between the *Gazette* notice and 17 June, which was the proposal deadline. That timeframe included a term break. They reported that a full consultation process with parents and schools had been adversely affected. Meaningful consultation by the lead schools (whose board of trustees would ultimately sign the contract with the Ministry) with the other schools in the cluster was therefore limited in most cases.

All lead schools mentioned the large time commitment that had to be made in continuing consultation once the initial proposal had been lodged, and in maintaining interest and identification with the Pacific Islands communities as well as the other schools in the cluster. The load on the principal and staff members who were writing and developing contracts, and embarking on more detailed planning with other staff and parents, was in addition to their normal teaching and administration workload.

Lead schools did make mention of the assistance and co-operation received from the Ministry in the time leading up to the contract signing, particularly those that had been initially "unsuccessful" but had entered into further negotiation to clarify and refine their proposal so that it was subsequently "successful".

Barriers to Effective Tendering

A range of ideas and suggestions about the tendering process came from the initial discussion with the lead schools in the clusters.

The schools' management reported the following as barriers:

- the timeframe and deadlines required for the tendering by the Ministry,
- the time-consuming nature of consultation with Pacific Islands communities that are diverse,
- the need for clearer guidelines about the process including translation services,
- difficult communication with Ministry personnel to access information, and
- the diversity of levels in the clusters themselves.

The schools' management reported that the factors which assisted the tendering process for

the contracts included:

- having a consultation group already in existence, which assisted in consultation for the new project,
- the Ministry providing designated people who consistently follow up with enquiries to clusters, someone to communicate with,
- having already negotiated and successfully tendered for a project from the Ministry, and
- having face-to-face visits by Ministry personnel.

Some of the schools in the clusters were already ones which received assistance from the Ministry in relation to the needs of their schools—they wondered whether there was a need for better co-ordination in the Ministry in terms of contracts, professional development, and curriculum contracts which also relate across to the priorities outlined in the Pacific Islands liaison project and Pacific Islands education policy as a whole.

Reported Advantages and Disadvantages of Working in Cluster Groups

The third question asked on the initial visit to the lead schools was concerned with advantages of working in clusters and disadvantages at this early stage of implementing the project.

Responses from the lead school varied with the size of the cluster, the level of the schools included, the shared history of the schools in the cluster, and the size of the geographical area. In some clusters the schools are located in close proximity, which made it easier for the liaison people to spend time in each school; others are more spread out, less accessible. Liaison people in the larger clusters said that face-to-face contact and being seen in all the schools was more important than phones or faxes, although at times they used these ways of keeping in contact with schools in the cluster.

A further perceived disadvantage about clusters by different lead schools was the level of priority given to the aims of the project or sense of "ownership" they each had. In 2 cases schools in the same cluster had been in competition in the tendering process, so whichever school won the contract finally and became the lead school, the other "lost", which may have affected this sense of ownership. Every cluster, for whatever reason, seemed to have 1 or 2 schools which they felt were still "on the periphery", but in most cases the lead school saw this as a challenge to be more proactive in their cluster.

It was felt that a range of communication strategies, inclusion at all meetings, and involvement in management had to be regular and ongoing right from day one in order to ensure all schools felt they belonged. Such ongoing contact would be the best approach to including all the schools into the total cluster.

One advantage reported for 3 of the clusters is that this project allowed them to strengthen existing shared initiatives that were already having some positive outcomes, for example, extending an existing homework centre. Another cluster cited the linking of parents across the cluster of schools which the funding would now help to become ongoing. In the interviews in May the respondents did not identify any constraints or difficulties on the sharing of initiatives, but later in the year, on the second visit, some difficulties regarding coverage of schools, shared visions, and ownership were articulated. On the whole, at this initial stage, clusters were seen to be useful and appropriate not only to reinforce the already shared values such as those in the state

integrated schools, but also as a way of building community networks where, for example, parents had children at more than one of the schools in the cluster.

Cluster Focus Group Interviews and Liaison People Interviews

A total of 34 parents participated in the interviews across 7 focus groups. The majority of parents were Samoan. A total of 33 teachers/school management participated in 6 focus groups. Across all the clusters the size of the groups of parents ranged from 2 to 8. Teachers' groups comprised 6 to 9 participants.

A total of 15 questions were asked in all of the focus groups. Questions 5, 10, and 11 had separate wordings for teachers and for parents because we wanted to find out about student outcomes from their different perspectives, and whether they perceived that the roles of teachers and parents had changed as a result of the project (*see* Appendix 1). In many instances there was a high level of agreement across the parent and teacher groups. The proposed model of home-school liaison in the following discussion depicts parents and teachers as partners in enhancing the educational achievement or outcomes for their children/students. We attempted through these questions to gather evidence of this partnership.

There were 7 liaison interviews completed. The 15 questions liaison people were asked to respond to are in Appendix 2. The results from the interviews with the cluster focus groups and the liaison people are considered together under a range of issues/themes which relate to some of the elements of the proposed model described in the discussion.

Levels of Involvement of Parents and Teachers

In the proposed model (p. 42) the levels of involvement by parents, teachers, and students are described as being in 3 stages.

1. Level of Awareness

The first stage is the extent to which all parties feel informed or are aware of the aims of the project.

In all of the focus group interviews participants were asked if they had been kept informed about the development of the liaison project in their schools (it was specified up to and including the final signing of the contract with the Ministry of Education and the employment of the liaison person/s).

Both parents and teachers reported that they were kept informed. In fact, all of the individual teachers across the 6 groups reported being well informed, and of the parents in each of the 7 groups only one or two individuals said they were not well informed of the development of the project. This result is not surprising given that liaison people were asked to invite people who had been involved in the project or whose children (in the case of parents) had been involved in the project.

Parents and teachers were asked about how well informed they felt about the project and what it was trying to achieve (from the time it was implemented up until and including the present time).

Again, all of the teachers/school management across the 6 focus groups reported that they

were very well informed or quite well informed about how their project was going. In each of the parent groups, again, only one or two out of each group felt that they were either not very well informed or knew very little; the rest felt very well informed or quite well informed. Parents who feel well informed about the project are more likely to be encouraged to become involved and contribute to the initiatives designed to help their children's progress at school.

2. Level of Contribution or Participation

The second level of involvement according to the model is characterised by contribution or participation.

Focus group members were asked to give reasons for their involvement or lack of involvement (which some individual members did report).

Both parents and teachers said the growing level of involvement of parents was occurring as a result of the planning and efforts of the liaison person/s to facilitate contributions of parents and teachers. Parents mentioned the goodwill of the school, and the principal's participation and commitment as very important; parents thought that the people involved in organising the involvement had the "right" values and personality which led people to trust them. By "right", parents meant that the liaison people were of the same cultural background and they related well to all the Pacific Islands parents. One parent group also mentioned how parents had approached other parents to become involved and that is how involvement developed.

Teachers saw the involvement of parents in multilevel clusters as having been built up over time where parents had children at 2 or more of the cluster schools. Teachers mentioned how schools had built upon already existing links such as sporting and cultural festivals to get parents involved. Several clusters mentioned holding an extremely successful, well-attended launch of the project (mostly organised by the liaison people), which had stimulated a lot of interest. Teachers in one cluster mentioned the development of ethnic committees as a structure with potential for involvement, and another noted the commencement of parent development and support programmes as being important in stimulating interest and involvement.

The reasons given for non-involvement with other schools were varied: both teachers and parents said time (namely, the lack of it) was the main reason. Parents also thought there was still some lack of co-ordination across the schools in the cluster, that the structure of the project affected how parents became involved, and they wondered if there was enough funding being spent on co-ordination. The parents said they tended to wait for the liaison person and the school to take the initiative and contact them. Teachers mentioned other school priorities, and parents specifically mentioned work or family priorities as a further reason. Teachers at several of the larger clusters thought there were perhaps too many schools in the cluster. Teachers also mentioned that perhaps there should be more teacher representation in the planning and management. Some teachers thought the liaison people were not paid enough or given enough paid hours of employment to do this aspect of the work, as there were still many more parents to be reached and encouraged to become involved.

3. Level of Analysis/Reflection Leading to Commitment or Ownership

Only the teacher groups were asked if they thought their projects had involved more parents in their schools. All clusters said "yes" except one cluster which said "no" but qualified that response

by saying that it was too soon to say yet. One cluster, of primary schools only, thought that some parents were involved differently, but not necessarily more, at this stage.

It was difficult to find evidence as yet of real ongoing commitment or ownership of the project across the clusters by parents or teachers given the short time since their establishment. There was also the timing factor, because at the time of the focus group interviews projects were waiting to find out whether funding had been extended for a further year. In such circumstances it may be difficult to develop and sustain commitment to, or engender ownership of, a project.

Examples of Effective/Successful Involvement

The groups of parents and teachers were asked to share their experiences about how well they thought the projects in their particular school were working, given the relatively short time the projects had been running.

Both sets of groups responded positively to this question and they detailed similar aspects which were working. Teachers noted better and increased communication with parents and families; parents noted a growth in parental support of their schools as a result of the liaison project. The setting up and the ongoing support of homework centres by parents and teachers is near the top of both lists as an example of an initiative which engendered joint involvement, as was the importance of the translation of newsletters and notices to parents. Teachers mentioned that Pacific Islands parents appear more at ease at school and have more confidence in asking teachers questions since the project began.

The liaison people were asked to give examples of the different ways/approaches they used in getting parents/communities and schools to work together. Methods they mentioned included:

- organising consultation meetings at school venues and in the community,
- ongoing consultation (networking) with principals, the management committee members, and informal groups and agencies in their communities,
- speaking at teacher forums and staff development meetings and courses,
- setting up homework centres as meeting points for staff and parent helpers,
- setting up a mentor system which facilitated parents and school working together through a Pacific Islands mentor who worked with their child/student,
- visiting families; talking to parents of successful students,
- observing in schools themselves and becoming involved with student learning and student activities, and
- running parent training and education sessions.

Liaison people reported the following as being the most successful of their initiatives so far to improve communication between students, schools, and parents:

- homework centres,
- parent meetings,
- linking with a home-school reading programme,
- linking with early childhood provisions,
- the mentoring programme,
- liaising with community agencies, politicians,
- setting up of steering committees for each ethnic group,

- displaying students' work and achievements,
- holding teacher meetings for all teachers,
- being part of training for Pacific Islands teachers, and
- working with holiday programmes at church and in the community.

The liaison people reported that there were also initiatives which were less successful and they identified possible causes:

- low numbers or turnout of parents because of other community/church/family/work commitments,
- difficulty of gaining support from church and community leaders who are already very busy,
- slow progress on getting translations completed for newsletters because translators were busy, and
- amount of time taken to maintain a mentoring programme as contacts are with mentors who are employed and have other commitments.

The liaison people reported other factors which worked against their being successful in facilitating communication and involvement and maintaining credibility:

- lack of clarification of roles with the management committee structure,
- differing expectations of schools in the cluster as to the outcomes of various planned activities,
- limited timeframe to set up and maintain networks,
- low teacher expectations of Pacific Islands students,
- lack of support for Pacific Islands teachers by schools, and
- failure by schools to address the Treaty of Waitangi issues and the polarisation and alienation of Māori against Pacific Islands students into gangs and competing ethnic peer groups.

The liaison people reported, however, that to date they felt the outcomes for parents were encouraging in that parents have realised how important it is for them to take time with their children (in terms of, for example, their reading and homework). Liaison people were enjoying their meetings with the co-ordinator/management committee as "they help us to plan and co-operate in the project". The fact that parents are turning up to schools and the teachers are beginning to know the parents was encouraging. In one cluster, the school newspapers are publishing students' work (as a result of the project) for all schools in the cluster, thereby displaying achievement that parents, teachers, and students could share.

Perceptions of Parents and Teachers Regarding the Role of the Liaison People

Both groups (parents and teachers) commented on how helpful/useful the liaison people were. However, the intended purposes for asking the question were different for the teachers and the parents' groups. Parents were specifically asked about how much the liaison person had helped them become more involved in the school, while the teachers were asked about why it is helpful to have a liaison person/s to co-ordinate the project.

Parents were unanimous: "The project would not work without them". The parents went on to comment that the choice of person/s is critical to deliver to the community, otherwise they could "turn off" parents. Liaison people need to understand Pacific Islands parents and what they are thinking, and to be strong in their own culture and language so they can relate both to elders and to young people. They need to know about the protocols which must be followed. They act as role models for parents and children so they need to be diplomatic, be respected by all, and be unbiased or not impose their own opinions or ideas. Co-ordination is a big and important task, according to parents, therefore it is essential for liaison people to be employed full time and to be accessible in order to carry out their many tasks. They have to be effective organisers to arrange meetings with guest speakers and keep up all the contacts at schools and in the community, and they must be good at passing on information to parents and teachers.

Parents also mentioned that perhaps each school in the cluster could have a liaison person or persons selected on a representative ethnic basis, for example, liaison people chosen to reflect the Pacific Islands school population which would include not only Samoan but other groups represented in the school—Cook Islands, Niuean, Tongan, and others.

Teachers agreed with most of the ideas put forward by the parents. Teachers groups all commented that the liaison person/s have been extremely helpful in the co-ordination of the project. They appreciated the feedback received from the liaison people: they thought that the liaison people should put in place systems that would carry on when they leave, and that it was important they had clear objectives and focus in their communication lines to people both inside and outside the area. One teacher group said that the person employed has to have total commitment and energy, be aware of students' and families' needs, and possibly have some research skills.

When asked about what parts of their project could be improved upon, over half of the parents' groups mentioned the need for more funding to extend their projects and specifically made comments about how the roles and responsibilities of the liaison person could be improved. They said that the liaison person should be given more hours and money to extend their present work. Two clusters argued for more administrative support and personnel for the liaison people. Other suggestions were for a better management structure (timetabling of visits/involvements, better supervision, and peer support), a regular section in the schools' newsletters, a base of operation for the liaison person (not necessarily in the lead school), and a clearer referral process for further contacts/services. The cluster with the mentoring scheme said that it would be better if one liaison person was employed to run just that—a mentoring system—as it takes a great deal of preparation, maintenance, monitoring, and energy. They would have liked to employ a second liaison person to organise and co-ordinate other activities.

Perceptions of Liaison People of Their Role

The liaison people were asked how they saw their roles and why they had applied for that position. They were asked about their personal goals when they offered themselves for the liaison position. The responses from the liaison people were varied. They included a desire to move out, to make contact with their community, to get feedback from the community, and to play a co-ordination role within the community as reasons for applying for the job. Several wanted to help parents by raising their awareness and confidence to help Pacific Islands children who are not

succeeding in the education system and to identify mentors for them. Several mentioned addressing language and communication difficulties between students and teachers. Others mentioned reasons of personal growth and the benefit of bringing experiences as a student themselves to the job. Another reported that this was his first full-time position and the job represented a real personal challenge. One of the liaison people saw this position as "an extension of my work with children at church".

Liaison people reported on the sources of help and strength during the project from within the school and school management and those in the community. Liaison people reported that their community links, Pacific Islands teachers on the board of trustees, and lead school principals were very supportive. Almost all mentioned their management committee, the principal, deputy principal, and staff co-ordinator; others mentioned as also being sources of strength were the teacher of the transition and home technology class, the caretaker and groundsman, the Samoan leader from the management committee, teachers in the school, and co-workers.

In the community, liaison people found support from parents, community leaders and networks, their own mentor or own family, and a colleague—a community worker who provided a listening ear. Others thought personal friends, the neighbouring liaison person, and the parish community priest and Catholic community were very supportive.

The sources of the most challenges for the liaison people during the project, both from within the school and the school management and from the outside community, were revealed.

Within schools, liaison people noted varied challenges. One school with a recent change of principal and low staff morale was very difficult to work with in terms of liaison and development. One liaison person mentioned the relationship with one head of department at the school and that person's attitudes as being challenging. A comment was made that in some schools the "gatekeepers" included some of the Pacific Islands teachers—this was possibly due to their levels of stress or the length of time they had been part of the school's liaison with Pacific Islands parents in the past. Several liaison people noted the resistance of some principals and teachers to the planned staff development and the management structure of the project.

In the community it was noted that some Pacific Islands parents' attitudes were negative as "they had suspicions about your job/role". Liaison people noted the great number of other social, health, and welfare projects already in the community, such that they thought parents were already overloaded with too many meetings, and it was difficult for parents to choose what to attend. Several noted the presence of Pacific Islands communities with their own local "politics" that erected barriers for them to work with or around. The remaining 4 out of 7 liaison people said they had found no community barriers.

On reflection, all liaison people reported that they had gained confidence in this position in terms of learning to respond to different people and groups; preparing and giving seminars; consulting with the wider range of people and community; communicating with principals and teachers; writing reports and doing other paperwork; using their own language more; and being more willing to speak up, speak out, and be assertive.

All liaison people thought they had developed as a person because they were getting better at setting goals and meeting goals, keeping track of deadlines, setting priorities including those of family and church, learning to pace themselves, and to "conserve your energy". Liaison people also said that as people they focus more on positives since starting in the job and have made many friends, both in schools and out in the communities. Other areas of learning listed by the liaison

people were that the job has extended their awareness of the community and in so doing extended their awareness of the need for their own professional development. This job, most say, "has highlighted my strengths and weaknesses".

Getting to know parents and understanding their needs and viewpoints has been a great learning experience, and in relation to that one liaison person realised "I need to take the initiative in analysing and working towards real empowerment for parents".

Individual comments were:

> [I get] enjoyment from the setting up of structures and systems and managing relationships between teachers, parents, and the wider bureaucracy and the political context.
>
> [I am] even more passionate now about maintaining the vision and the shared vision for the Pacific Islands children [in education].
>
> I want to train as a teacher now.
>
> [I think it is] very important to portray a good image—I [always] dress up to go into schools to work with children.

They all saw the need now, looking back, for them to be more assertive themselves about their roles and responsibilities which could probably have saved them time in the long run. For the liaison people who were paired, they recommended that by working together as a pair they achieved more, covered a wider net, and they could truly say it had been a real pleasure to work together.

Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Outcomes for Students

Teachers and parents were asked about how their students/children had been helped by the project.

Both groups mentioned increased self-confidence in students, an improvement in learning (particularly reading and writing), completion of school and homework, and students being more focused. Parents in one cluster noted particularly opportunities created for students to share/present their completed work which made them and the students very proud. Teachers particularly noted a valuing of the students' own culture/s and languages as being enhanced in the process. One cluster with a mentor project mentioned that having both peers and mentors from the community helped their children/students to build positive relationships and to "stand taller".

Both sets of groups were unanimous that there had been some positive outcomes for students. The main benefits from the teachers' viewpoint were that the schools were now being held more accountable for the achievement of their Pacific Islands students; that, as a result of the project, many felt they were less likely now to categorise Pacific Islands students; and that the project had made more effort to link with outside agencies/resources that would be of benefit to their Pacific Islands students.

All of the parents' groups mentioned the higher self-esteem of their children since being a part of the project, whether it was from being involved in a homework centre, or at parent meetings on how to help your child, or being involved in a mentoring programme. Some clusters

mentioned this higher self-esteem is paralleled by a rising self-confidence in the Pacific Islands communities in their areas.

The project with the mentor programme was praised by the parents as giving the students a goal to work towards, fixing them into a career path and/or work experience. All the cluster group parents praised the work of their liaison people whom they said were excellent role models, accessible to the students, and admired by them for who they are and what they are doing. Parents also congratulated the teachers and schools for a number of initiatives (which varied across the clusters) for Pacific Islands students: allowing the liaison person to bridge the gaps between home and school; giving more information on career alternatives, grants and scholarships, and further training; making more contact with parents for positive reasons and not just for poor behaviour; introducing modules at school reflecting the students' interests and backgrounds; and organising homework centres which help the students with study habits particularly before exams. One cluster said: "It just shows how our students require the best trained teachers who inspire and instil confidence in their students' cultures and their achievements."

Many parents called for an extension of present initiatives to cover more/other Pacific Islands students with better follow-up of what is happening for the students. So far, one cluster reported that the school (internal) English examination results are better, but more time is needed to see if there has been real progress. As mentioned previously at least 2 clusters wanted to extend their present model into early childhood education and transition-to-school initiatives. A survey of local needs was seen to be important as a way of being able to be more responsive to students and parents. The final word came from one group of parents. They said that in the final analysis the "community needs to see [the] school make the [first] step, [then] have the final say/approval" of what must be done.

Teacher groups thought (where this applied) that the project must make more allowance for different needs between schools and between levels as students have different academic and social needs at different levels of schooling.

Liaison People's Perceptions of Outcomes for Students

The liaison people were also asked about the benefits as they saw them for students as a result of their work in the project.

All liaison people reported some evidence of benefits for children, the main ones being higher self-esteem and a more positive attitude to school and to their expectations of what they can achieve, for example, School Certificate. Examples of this change included more attention and time to study; improvement in writing skills/confidence in producing written work; more regular attendance and arrival at school; improved knowledge about the purpose of homework and how to do it; and starting to set goals to achieve. Another important aspect is that the students see parents involved in homework centres and, as a result of that interest, are being encouraged to carry on with their education. Liaison people report that teachers are also increasingly believing students can achieve. With such encouragement from both parents and teachers, children are beginning to realise education is the most important thing. The cluster with the mentoring programme reported the students enjoy the opportunity to talk to someone on their level and enjoy being involved with good role models and advocates for students who can speak Pacific Islands languages. In another cluster the liaison person (male) is working successfully with young

males at risk to encourage self-esteem. He also links with their parents. As several of the liaison people remarked, the real benefits of all these are not able to be seen yet—it is too early—but the signs are very encouraging.

Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Outcomes for Parents

Parents' and teachers' groups were asked about how they felt parents had been helped by the project.

Both groups mentioned the greater confidence of parents to approach schools and ask questions, and their increasing knowledge about the schools' systems—how they work and how they are managed. Teachers noted that some of the boards of trustees are "moving out of their comfort zones" as a result of Pacific Islands parents' interest in schools and their children's learning. Parents felt better able to see their children's progress and in a better position to help them, while teachers thought parents were making more positive acknowledgments of their child's achievement and a more "truthful" one. Parents also made specific mention of the liaison person as helping them to become more involved with the school and their children's learning through personal contact and the kinds of opportunities set up, such as parent meetings and homework centres. Further examples given by parents included "breaking down" the status of teachers; being better able to compare schools; being better informed about the boards of trustees and better informed through translated newsletters. One group of teachers believed that this was a very good beginning to a greater partnership between schools and parents. Parents reported their increased involvement was through such opportunities as the school (teachers) setting up Pacific Islands modules to involve them; they felt more confident to be involved at home with their children's homework and their TV watching. Parents liked the opportunities of getting together more with other Pacific Islands parents, and others reported that with growing confidence they are now involved in committees at school.

Parents asked for the extension of the kinds of involvements they already have, such as more/some parents on the project management team, and encouragement and training for Pacific Islands parents to stand for election to boards of trustees. Parents also suggested the schools in their clusters should employ more Pacific Islands teacher aides. A higher profile of successes and positive achievements was called for (such as displays of student work) that would act as encouragement for other students. More acknowledgment should be given for commitment to the school by students and parents and the many voluntary contributions that are made to the project.

Liaison People's Perceptions of Outcomes for Parents

Liaison people were asked about the outcomes/benefits for parents and communities as a result of their work. Firstly, all the liaison people felt there has been a growth in parents' knowledge of, understanding about, and agreement with, the project. They witness parents' increased involvement in homework centres and other activities, and their increased learning about the process of writing and reading. Parents have really enjoyed meeting their child's mentor and generally appear happier with their child's progress. Liaison people report how parents are starting to identify with their children, particularly when parents are put through the same learning experiences as their children at parent evenings. Also at parents' meetings they have been

getting to know other parents (including others outside their own island community) and have been able to share parental experiences. Other positives reported: parents are more confident to come to schools and ask questions and give feedback; they appreciate having an advocate who can speak their language (the liaison person); they are receiving more positive recognition of their roles by the schools; and, with the higher visibility of education issues, their concerns as Pacific Islands parents are beginning to be heard.

Some of the most difficult aspects of the liaison person's job include coping with parents who do not want to be involved and seeing parents not using the help or resources available. They have found this frustrating. Both pairs of liaison people reported that they are operating within very active communities of churches, agencies, and organisations which are already aware of education issues, and as a consequence Pacific Islands parents are very busy. If they could make any improvements they said they need more administrative support.

Teachers' and Liaison People's Perceptions of Outcomes for Teachers/Schools

Teachers' groups were asked whether, since the project began, they had felt more involved with the school and with the Pacific Islands students.

All of the teachers across all of the focus groups said "yes". Teachers reported their increased involvement with Pacific Islands parents and students through particular activities such as PRIDE[1] in schools. In fact they reported an improved level of interaction with parents both in quantity and quality. Some of the teachers reported feeling closer to their communities through shared experiences set up by the liaison person, and they now feel ready to look more closely at barriers to learning, and at teaching content that is more relevant (this was at a secondary level). Several of the clusters (with primary children) reported that they were becoming more interested/involved in transition-to-school and early childhood education in their communities.

Liaison people reported that as a result of their work they had seen teachers changing, for example, their mindsets have been challenged, they appear to be "more positive knowing I am available", they are pronouncing students' names accurately, and are becoming more aware of our values and systems. From their point of view, liaison people thought they saw better use of Pacific Islands resources across the curriculum, teachers are more interested in asking questions and requesting specific strategies. The cluster with the mentor scheme reported teachers are happy with student progress in writing, pleased with improved presentation of work, and are celebrating the success with students. Through more contact all liaison people report that teachers are understanding Pacific Islands parents better and myths are being dispelled. One cluster reports that some teachers in the cluster still think they "should send the problems to me". Another liaison person said "the teachers have received support, encouragement, and love from the liaison people".

Developing Relationships among Parents, Teachers, and Students

All the groups of parents and teachers shared their perspectives on whether the project had involved all 3 groups: parents, teachers, and students.

Parents all said a qualified "yes" making comments such as "It's early days—is happening

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[1] PRIDE is a self-esteem programme run by Pacific Islands community workers.

though" and "Too soon? Liaison person is working though to get all parties together". Some of the parents said that a strong relationship is being built up but more work is required with and by the teachers. Parents noted that there are more parents going to school reporting to parent evenings and they were "getting the message" through the use of translated newsletters. The projects which had homework centres were welcomed by parents as allowing them to make more of their opportunities and as a way parents can take a closer interest in their children's school work. One group thought that there are flow-on effects to younger children in the family even to the extent of creating interest before they start school and at the early childhood level. In one cluster an involved parent was also teaching at a local *a'oga amata* (Samoan early childhood centre), and she was keen to make an ongoing connection with the schools in that cluster. Parents also noted how their sons and daughters were working more co-operatively, comparing and sharing written work resulting in a more positive attitude to school. Such attitudes were very pleasing to the parents.

Teachers' replies to this question about the relationship between parents, students, and teachers were more guarded. Half of the sample made the point that it was too early to tell but they felt they were on the right track and such relationships take time to develop. The teachers did make note though of the increased number of parents coming to parent interview nights and an increase in home-school links. One example given was the setting up of a Cook Islands bilingual unit at the school as a result of negotiation with parents.

Management Issues

Liaison people noted the importance of the role of the lead school in relation to the other schools and how it affected relationships across the clusters. For example, the lead school needs to keep all the principals and staff in the cluster schools informed about the contract and its purposes, otherwise they do not feel a part of it.

The teacher/school management responses centred around organisational factors, such as reducing the number of schools in the cluster and/or giving every school its own liaison person. In this way schools could take the initiative about what they want or need within their own school and be better able to work within their present limitations such as staffing constraints.

In terms of involvement with teachers and parents from other schools in their cluster, two-thirds of the parents' groups said they have had some contact with parents/teachers of the other schools in the cluster; the same proportion of teachers said that across the groups they had had some contact as well.

In relation to the management committee support, the paired liaison people raised the fact that they had to work out their respective roles/tasks from the beginning: "We had to 'ad lib' initially, particularly coping with management structures and changes." They also referred to the pressures associated with stop/start funding, the short time-span which affected the development of relationships, and being tied to milestones. They mentioned that "this is the first time we have done a job like this, we have had to learn so quickly, it's a totally different job". Being tied to the contract for all of them was a new experience and it was good to talk with other liaison people/co-ordinators. Even though they were all very busy, they believed they have stuck to the contract despite some of them having been told they were "veering off".

The issue, and the forms and functions, of the management committees were raised. The

general criticisms about lack of leadership and changing structures that were voiced, were done so informally and anecdotally. Liaison people reported, for example, that since commencing employment the management committee membership and composition had undergone several "restructurings". Changes of lead school principals and cluster principals also provided challenges for liaison people having to readjust to different leadership styles and priorities. Establishing the important relationships that liaison people require as a basis of reference and support for their work with teachers and parents and communities, was believed to be crucial to their effectiveness and credibility. One exception was the management committee of a cluster which was observed to be proactive, united, co-ordinated, and strategic. Their liaison person was said to possess all those characteristics as well, such that effective management was being exercised from the first stages of their working together.

Funding Issues

Funding issues were uppermost in the minds of all the interviewees at the time of the focus group and individual interviews. There was no lack, therefore, of comment about funding, as schools were awaiting approval for the extension of funding for projects into their second year. Most comments centred around the need for more and continued funding to support the projects into the future.

Teachers argued for more information about funding and a clearer breakdown of funds related to specific aspects of the project so that specific outcomes could be seen. Schools reported they required a better knowledge of processes to identify student needs and background knowledge, such as languages in the home, and that money for the research required to do this should be available. Some groups thought that the liaison people should be scheduled on a regular basis for school visits and they should receive more financial support in carrying out such tasks.

Parents within and across groups were in total agreement about more time and funding for their liaison people. However, parents' responses centred around funding going into learning: increasing the reading and other learning resources in schools, extending the project into more curriculum areas, and involving more of the students in the project. They wanted more assistance for ESL parents and children and funding for more teacher involvement in the project. A further interest by parents in at least 2 of the clusters was the possibility of linking up with a proposed "HIPPY" project (a home-based early childhood programme) and other early childhood centres. At the time of the interviews extra funding was being sought from outside sources to put these ideas into effect. A couple of clusters of schools were already involving parents of children who were nearing school entry and parents commented favourably on the value of these.

In terms of other comments made about funding and the Pacific Islands liaison project, the teachers' groups remarked that there were more Pacific Islands teachers in positions of responsibility, and that the government is getting a good deal for its money with the many hours spent in meetings and other time put into implementing the project—it is really a very inexpensive (cost-effective) project. All groups said that the project should keep going beyond the funding if possible. Several cautioned against withdrawing funding too soon and definitely not before it was able to be extended to more students who are not currently involved. The support was unanimous that this was a great project because it was raising awareness, and providing a real focus to get things started.

The parents' groups agreed that the project should be funded beyond 2 years. It is "opening doors for our teenagers to create their own culture". It is also reminding Pacific Islands parents how important education is and that things still have to be done, they said. Parents agreed with the teachers' groups which said that there should be more people involved as resources, for example, parents who could be funded/reimbursed for expenses when assisting the liaison people. In terms of parent meetings at the school, one cluster liked the use of both large and small group gatherings: large groups they said produce a range of ideas, while small groups help people to speak up more.

Nature of the Clusters and Future Developments

The results of the questions posed by the researcher at initial cluster visits about positives and negatives of clusters are already mentioned in the initial section of the results.

In terms of the focus group interviews, teachers thought that information about the project should be more widely circulated across all the staff in the schools. It needs to be noted that the focus groups participants are already involved and committed to the project, but this is still not so for all staff, in all schools in the cluster. They have not been as closely involved as the interviewees, and so there is still a need for information to be circulated to all schools and parents in the cluster.

Therefore, teachers said, schools still need support from outside agencies "on the ground" that can work more directly with meeting family needs as a support to the project. More liaison with the Ministry of Education would be helpful where it could supply information and support to clusters arising from similar cluster initiatives or initiatives for Pacific Islands students. Several clusters also mentioned that this kind of project should be extended to Māori families in their schools. Several schools also wanted to have a greater database of local and community information, as well as careers/employment possibilities, and a better ability to follow up on Pacific Islands achievers/successes in the education system as possible mentors or role models who could be shared across the clusters.

The liaison people had views on the advantages of working in a cluster or grouping of schools. In one cluster it was reported that "as we are all part of one parish, it is easier to work with the schools". The liaison people mentioned getting to know a wide range of people across schools, being able to compare differences in relationships between children and teachers, and getting to know the many children they meet after school, for example, at the shopping centre, as advantages. They think that students have also gained from interaction across schools; that teachers are sharing ideas across schools, and the project is therefore gaining acceptance across all schools. It helps in terms of time and access if the schools in the cluster are located geographically close together. In clusters where principals already link up that has helped a great deal to prepare the way for the liaison person/s they said.

The liaison people all said that the ability to make their own links into and within the community has been a real advantage and they are now able to see the continuity from primary and intermediate schools through to secondary. In the very near future, several liaison people said, there is a need to look at early childhood education, as it concerns the same families (with children at the cluster schools) who are presently in the project.

The disadvantages of working in a cluster or grouping of schools for the liaison people

included the differences between schools in terms of timetables, programmes, parents, and families and how they look at things, which can be a disadvantage. It takes time to get to know schools and for them to get to know you, they reported. Four of the liaison people said that the clusters were too large for them to meet all the needs. At times it seems there are too many focuses to juggle across all the schools in the clusters. One liaison person said there were no disadvantages except spending enough time at each school and a tendency to be spread too thinly across schools. Three liaison people said there were very few disadvantages but these tended to be from the smaller clusters.

The liaison people reported that in most cases the schools liked being in a cluster, but they each have their own way of looking at things, their own problems, and their own priorities. There is, however, probably more agreement on issues across schools than disagreement. Clusters show how working together is important in developing a sense of belonging, identity, and stability—a feeling of community is therefore developing. Combined parents' meetings across schools have helped parents to compare schools. In a couple of clusters, a change of principals has hampered progress towards the real inclusion of their individual schools in the project, but in those cases clusters were aware of this and aiming to address it in their future planning and co-ordination.

Monitoring the Objectives of the Cluster Groups

The liaison people were asked: "What strategies/measures/indicators have you used to measure whether you have met your objectives or not?". Liaison people reported they were using student progress/achievement as reported by teachers, the meeting of contract milestones, and sharing achievements with other liaison colleagues, in order to develop next year's strategies. They used observations and evaluations from parents and students, and the number of students expressing a wish to join programmes next year, as indicators of their success. More specifically, at weekly meetings liaison people looked at their achievements of the past week and planned for the following week. Other more subjective methods included feedback from their own impressions and feelings, reactions and feelings from principals on the roles and tasks liaison people had carried out, and informal feedback from parents and community. One liaison person added: "A lot of what I do cannot be quantified".

Time and Timing Issues

Liaison people stressed that it requires a great deal of time to set up relationships between schools and to co-ordinate the work, and they feel they do not get enough appreciation or acknowledgment from the Ministry of Education for this aspect of their work.

It needs to be noted here that timing is also raised in relation to effective involvement, the nature of clusters, the work of the liaison person, and funding.

Analysis and Reflection by Liaison People

The liaison people (only one of whom is a trained teacher) were asked, in considering their experiences to date, to reflect on home-school relationships from their own perspectives that they could share with other schools with Pacific Islands students.

This included what they learnt about home-school relationships and how these are built up.

A summary of the themes raised by the liaison people is given below. They apply across the schools and clusters which have Pacific Islands students and families.

1. The relationship between home and school has to be two-way and very strong—like building a bridge, [you] have to keep working at it.
2. Teachers need to keep parents informed about their children's positive achievements as well as the behaviour of their children.
3. Schools need to find ways for parents, teachers, and students to meet together.
4. Attention needs to be given by school management and principals to teachers' stereotyping, attitudes, and expectations about Pacific Islands families, and realise how these affect learning.
5. Parents need to be encouraged to speak up, to question and get involved, and teachers and schools have to take initiatives.
6. Gifted Pacific Islands students have been forgotten—our children are not all underachievers.
7. Breaking down the barriers based on incorrect perceptions (by both partners, parents, and teachers) is very important.
8. Pacific Islands parents understand there is no level playing field, but many cannot articulate this.
9. The liaison person/s who are appointed have to be very carefully chosen so that they can carry out their many roles. It is important that they know the communities or can get to know them quickly.
10. Teachers need to look at themselves when they have problems with Pacific Islands children and not to blame the homes.
11. Pacific Islands parents would benefit from opportunities to network more and support each other more.
12. Schools cannot isolate themselves from their communities.

Most of the liaison people were very willing to analyse and reflect on home-school relationships. They shared ideas about models of devolution, and structures that would become self-supporting when they left. Their analysis has brought them to a realisation that there are still barriers of low teacher expectations, not enough Pacific Islands teachers in leadership roles, and barriers to full partnership between schools and Pacific Islands parents. The low achievement rates of Pacific Islands students also contribute to the overall picture of inequality of access, participation, and outcomes in education. In other words, on the basis of their experience in the projects, there is still structural inequality in the New Zealand education system for Pacific Islands students. A number of those liaison people being interviewed had not heard by November/December whether they still were to be employed on their projects in 1998. Nevertheless, they still looked forward into the future of the project and analysed critically what they had achieved.

Results of Joint Liaison Interviews

In 2 of the cluster projects the management committee had employed 2 liaison people. In one of the clusters there was one full-time and one part-time worker; in the other, the management committee had employed 2 part-time workers. I interviewed both pairs in addition to their individual interviews. The 2 joint interviews had essentially one question and that concentrated on the advantages and disadvantages of working as a team.

Advantages

Both pairs saw the combining of 2 different strengths, experiences, and cultural backgrounds as very advantageous. In one pair there was a combination of an older/more experienced female parent (which has helped to bring parents in) with a male ex-pupil, highly respected by students and parents alike. They reported that they can be listened to and can act both as role models and as a parent, having already had contact with principals. The young male, a former student of the lead school, was already known and respected before the project employed him.

In the second pair, again there was a male and female and they were from different Pacific Islands groups, which was appropriate given the school populations in the cluster. Both pairs enjoyed their ability to work across a wide range of groups. They also highly valued the mutual support, the sharing of ideas, testing out their understandings about how each saw or interpreted things, and being able to act as a sounding board for each other. Both pairs said they were very comfortable with their respective responsibilities and the using of each other's strengths.

Disadvantages

Both pairs said there were no disadvantages really, " the job is so big and we have a range of schools—it's a complex job". They all said time was a real challenge in terms of getting through all their tasks. When they are on limited hours, trying to tie the partner who is a part-timer down is difficult—schools say they want her but are unable to schedule at the time she is available. Both pairs reported that more time needs to be allocated for the management and co-ordination of 2 people. It has been a process of working through issues with the management committee, for example, in the clarification of roles of all the members of the committee and the liaison people. At this point in their projects both pairs see the need for some professional development for themselves but from their point of view there did not seem to be enough time for it to happen.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section the key themes or issues that have emerged as a result of both the interview process and the literature review will be discussed; the overall research questions will be responded to; final recommendations will be made to the Ministry in relation to its tendering processes to Pacific Islands communities; and, finally, recommendations for possible follow-up research will be made.

Prior to discussing the key themes, mention must be made of areas that are of importance to home-school relationships but which the time and budget limitations placed on this independent evaluation precluded. However, they do impinge on some of the elements in the proposed model and need to be discussed here.

Issues of Monitoring and Evaluation

The clusters themselves were asked to monitor their projects in order to report to the Ministry of Education on the achievement of agreed milestones. The Ministry of Education did give some information to the liaison people and the clusters on monitoring; however, from observation (and without documented evidence) that may not have been adequate, given the variable levels of expertise demonstrated in the milestone reports viewed by the researcher.

There was also some confusion expressed at the initial visits about the differences between monitoring and evaluation in relation to the projects. At least 2 of the clusters were aware of the need for collecting "objective data" over time to show that their projects had indeed raised the levels of achievement of their Pacific Islands students. Some researchers, for example, Lareau and Shumar (1996), suggest thorough-going evaluation should involve setting up control groups (receiving no intervention) to compare with those which are in the project. The schools did not know who was responsible for any such evaluation, and felt anyway that it would be beyond their resources. This report is not about to make any assertions as to the origins or causes of such misunderstandings, but the purpose here (in terms of schools'/clusters' accountability to demonstrate higher achievement levels) is to signal that this issue would need closer attention in any future evaluation.

Issues about Teacher Development and Support for Pacific Islands Teachers

The comments about observed resistance to teacher development in home-school relationships may be understandable in the present climate of ongoing national curriculum developments and participation required of teachers, but there are still instances (as picked up by the liaison people) of negative stereotyping and low expectations, held by individual teachers, of Pacific Islands students and their families. The topic of teacher attitudes and expectations needs to be examined more closely in any future research into home-school relationships because inappropriate attitudes will undermine well-intentioned initiatives to involve Pacific Islands families in the learning process.

Related to this is the support and teacher development of Pacific Islands teachers. Anecdotally we know that these teachers, like their Māori colleagues, are often given extra (out-of-class) responsibilities such as taking school-wide cultural performance groups, linking with Pacific Islands parents and networks, and working with Pacific Islands students to meet their social,

cultural, and educational needs. When such teachers are offered opportunities for teacher development and promotion, it is often not supported by their colleagues for fear that the school may lose them. Such a short-sighted view contributes to the lack of numbers of Pacific Islands teachers in the higher levels of teaching and education administration. These observations have also emerged from an associated contract for Pacific Islands teacher professional development run by Lily Tuioti over 1997–98.

One liaison person commented that Pacific Islands teachers could be "gatekeepers". This comment needs to be viewed with some understanding in that if those teachers have remained teaching for a long time in the New Zealand system they may have learnt to survive in their own way by supporting the dominant values or culture of the school. They may not have felt comfortable in asserting themselves in the context of being perhaps the only Pacific Islands teacher on the staff, or constrained by having no higher status in the school than that of a classroom teacher. The liaison people in this project do view Pacific Islands teachers as a support to liaising with parents and as such their views as "newcomers" into the culture of schools need to be noted.

Outcomes for Students

As stated previously, this evaluation study did not interview the Pacific Islands students involved in the projects. The only "views" of the outcomes for them are reported from the perspectives of their parents, their teachers, and the liaison people involved with them. In relation to the proposed model in this report, Pacific Islands students experience (and erect, according to Hawk and Hill's study) barriers that can undermine the relationships between themselves and parents and teachers and the relationships between home and school. The barriers to student learning of health (including sight and hearing), diet, peer pressures, work, and cultural commitments are fully documented by Hawk and Hill (1996, pp. 135–191).

The outcomes of Pacific Islands students' involvement or participation in schooling and learning of better attendance, improved study habits, and better attitudes to learning are the shared focus of parent-teacher relationships. The clusters that are bringing parents into the learning process, sharing students' positive achievements, and monitoring students' better time use and activities seem to be taking a very positive step in breaking down some of those barriers.

The teachers and schools have an important role to play in furthering this relationship with parents and students. Some evidence has come through the literature, and indeed this study too, that teachers need to be committed to home-school liaison by having realistic and accurate information about the lives and priorities of Pacific Islands students and their families. This is beginning to happen in most clusters.

In a study called *Getting Heard*, carried out by Lloyd Martin (1998) in a Porirua secondary school, students identified that the greatest hindrance to their future achievement was the "bad" typecasting by their teachers. The youth workers who were involved in the intervention studied by Martin agreed that the low expectations held by some teachers left little room for the students to improve themselves. That study concluded that these "at risk" students must get appropriate support (such as the youth workers who were able to bridge the "two worlds" of the students) to make any progress academically or behaviourally. The liaison people played this role in the liaison project.

Cultural Issues and Establishing Relationships with Pacific Islands Parents

The liaison people commented on a level of "suspicion" about them and their role by the Pacific Islands communities and parents. Such challenges are important and need to be articulated for the sake of any schools/teachers who attempt to involve their Pacific Islands parents and receive similar responses. There is a need to gain credibility with the communities even if they are of the same background. It is important to establish and acknowledge any family, village, or extended family relationships, friendships, or common experiences that may exist. A level of (quiet) confidence is expected if the liaison person is perceived to be of status. Professionals are expected to know what they are doing or wanting to achieve. Pacific Islands communities make judgments based on actions not words, on perceived commitment over time, and whether the outcome is not for individual gain or kudos, but rather results in service to all people.

Time and Timing Issues

The proposed model shows how the contexts and the relationships are located in time and how the time an intervention or a set of relationships takes to develop is important. The time (that is, the day or hour set) when a meeting is held may also determine whether parents attend or not. Such uncertainties do make the establishment and maintaining of home-school relationships problematic and fraught with a level of frustration. According to Lareau and Shumar (1996) schools have to acknowledge and accommodate family structures and priorities, participation in the workforce or community networks, childcare arrangements, and access to transportation in terms of inviting parent participation. Timing and venues of parent-teacher conferences and meetings are also important influences on whether parents attend.

The liaison people recognise how many demands there are on parents with church, family, and other social agency meetings that conflict with the schools' timing of meetings. The liaison people have had to learn about those other demands in order to work around them or at least take them into account when asking for participation.

The other aspect of timing relates closely to funding and the fact that all the projects were told by the Ministry of Education that initially the funding under the liaison contracts would be for 1 year's duration and probably for 2 years. The situation was to be reviewed at the end of the first year. The interviews for this independent evaluation were taking place around the time when projects were waiting to hear if their funding was to be continued in the next year. It was not surprising, therefore, that there was some anxiety as parents, teachers, and liaison people talked about what their projects had achieved thus far and whether what had been achieved was acceptable or sufficient reason for further funding.

Was there any understanding by the Ministry of Education, they said, that what the clusters were participating in was a developmental process and that it took the first year just to get established and make the links? Would it be continued? Such uncertainty, and the concern for the vulnerability of what had been achieved thus far, is real. Longer terms of intervention are supported throughout the literature.

The Irish experience reported by Stack (1998) had a pilot of 3 years and has been running since 1993. Chrispeels (1996) alerts teachers and effective schools that they should expect results only after 3 to 5 years of teacher development and the development of relationships. Epstein (1995)

suggests that a 3-year plan has to be developed for home-school partnerships to account for the many aspects and dimensions (as depicted in the proposed model) of those relationships. She outlines such developments as action teams, funding, finding appropriate starting points (assessing present strengths and predicting future needs), and strengthening networks once they have been established.

Funding Issues

Funding issues relate closely to the issues of time and timing. Further than that, the present short-term contract arrangements are inimical to the kinds of home-school development models emerging from the Pacific Islands liaison project. Short-term major funding periods set up anxiety among the people at the "community-face" which can contribute to inefficiency, and waste of funding in the long run. They probably compromise the positive outcomes of such a project.

There was also concern expressed in the focus group interviews about what would happen when, inevitably, the funding for the project would run out after the second year. The idea of being left "high and dry" without some period of transition was a fear expressed.

Further, at the time of the interviews an initiative for strengthening South Auckland schools had just been announced by the Ministry of Education with a budget of approximately $3 million per year. Meanwhile, clusters who felt they were putting a lot of effort into their liaison projects for Pacific Islands children were waiting to hear about their funding which was considerably less than that. Perhaps there needed to be some co-ordination between the timing of announcements by the Ministry in such cases, was a comment made by one of the teachers' groups.

Overall Research Questions

The Tendering Process

The research questions relating to the process of developing tenders and examples of good practice for the Ministry of Education have been outlined in previous sections but to summarise: schools followed a common sequence of development which at some points the clusters found difficult to complete without assistance. The most successful clusters were those which had already negotiated contracts with the Ministry and knew the process well; first-time contractees found the process and time constraints difficult.

Concern was expressed about not having adequate time to consult with Pacific Islands parents and communities during the contract development process. Some schools, teachers, and parents went ahead without adequate consultation but were then required to work harder after the contract was signed with the Ministry to obtain Pacific Islands support and a sense of ownership of the project.

Good practice, as perceived by the schools, would include an allocation of time for first-time applicants and for wider consultation, although no particular length of time was suggested. Schools liked having a specific person to contact in the Ministry because it assured them of consistent support and advice. In addition that person was accessible/contactable about the liaison project and knew all about it. Schools and clusters really appreciated a face-to-face visit and being able to talk with officials directly. It was felt that such visits gave the Ministry staff a better appreciation of their particular contexts, such as the location of schools in the cluster.

Aims and Objectives of Each Project

One research question about the project concerned the aims and objectives of each project. These are summarised early in this report (pp. 3 & 4). It needs to be noted that each of these aims and projects required a number of tasks which had to be completed and deadlines met. The overriding difficulty for clusters was estimating in advance how long tasks would actually take, for example, translating newsletters, finding a suitable date/time for parent meetings, and so forth. Although the milestone reports indicate most planned tasks were met, the nature of the relationships, the cultural dimensions, and the qualities of the relationships as outlined in the proposed model cannot always be articulated or quantified. The consequence of this could be that these aspects of a project go unacknowledged or unappreciated. Much comes back to the skills, knowledge, and initiative of the liaison person/s in each project. It was indeed fortunate for the clusters that they employed the individuals they did, since much of the project's success was attributed by the parents and teachers to them.

Monitoring

The systems used by the clusters to measure whether their objectives were met coincide in terms of time with their milestone reports and the extent to which the agreed outcomes were achieved. Some clusters used indicators such as numbers of parents attending, and feedback (verbal mostly, but also written). Apart from the information given by the liaison people in the interviews, it was difficult to get a clearer picture of how schools measure their "success". However, the clusters received a preliminary summary of the main findings from the focus group interviews in this study, and the positive feedback from parents and teachers would add to the information about the success of their project in the first year.

Description of Models/Parts of Models

The next group of questions relating to progress towards aims and the request for descriptions of models presented quite a challenge, considering the diversity of the clusters. In order to answer to what extent schools are progressing towards these objectives, it was necessary to map out an overall model of home-school relationships in the Pacific Islands liaison project. The model is an ideal—what effective liaison would look like if allowed to develop according to the visions described by clusters.

A further challenge was to take into account the range of contexts in which clusters were working: the nature of home-school relationships; the importance of the relationships between parents, students, and teachers; the barriers to those relationships; the kinds of contributions each could make and needed to make in the future; and, most importantly, the envisaged outcomes for each of the groups. The key role of the liaison person had to figure centrally in any model.

The outcome of analysing the interview data, referring back to the literature, and reliance on a measure of cultural knowledge and community experience was the development of a proposed model.

The questions relating to clusters, their advantages and disadvantages, are outlined in the results but, in summary, the most important feature emerging from the interviews is that schools should not be too great in number. A cluster of more than 7 or 8 schools, at different levels of

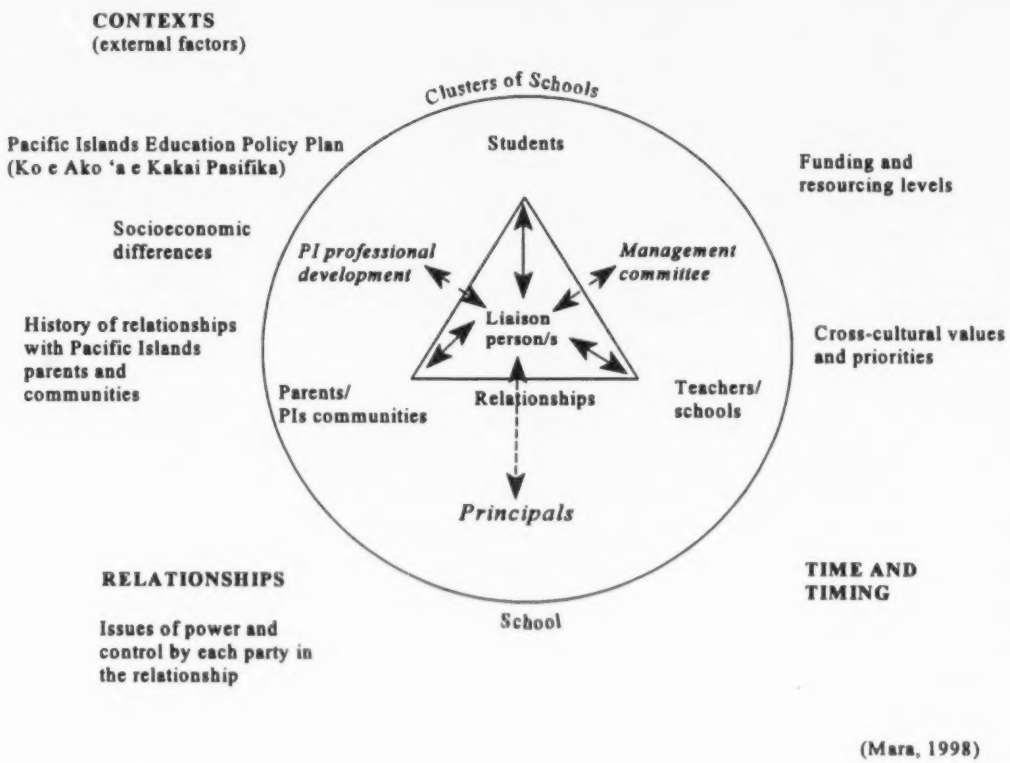
primary and secondary, becomes difficult for one liaison person to service efficiently and effectively. Having different levels within a cluster which has a shared philosophy was also seen as a positive feature.

A Proposed Model of Pacific Islands School-Parent-Community Liaison

(Derived from the independent evaluation of the Pacific Islands Liaison Project and a literature review)

As outlined on p. 11 of this report, the researcher developed a proposed model, derived from the elements of models from clusters and a literature review, to serve 2 functions: first, to prevent the description of initiatives (or models) from the school clusters becoming de-contextualised and being seen as "recipes" for home-school liaison; second, it was thought that schools outside the project might find a more generalised model (incorporating essential aspects of the liaison project) more useful when considering planning the development of their own home-school initiatives with Pacific Islands parents and communities.

PROPOSED MODEL



(Mara, 1998)

Relationships Between Students, Parents, and Teachers

Despite the diversity across clusters, a number of commonalities become apparent. These are centred around the particular structures that have been established and the personnel who have been appointed as liaison people to meet the project aims. Their task is to liaise with students, and

all teachers and parents, as well as other groups and agencies that have links to the cluster of schools. The proposed model lays out the main relationships and contexts of the liaison project as it has been set up.

At the centre of any successful model lies the positive relationships between the principal parties or "players": the parents/families; the students; the schools/teachers and principals; the liaison person/s; and the project management committee. Each party views the relationship from a different perspective and has differing expectations of the other parties (according to the literature). What each shares with the others is an interest and concern about the achievement levels (outcomes) for their students/children. Given this underlying characteristic of the Pacific Islands liaison project, attention needs to be focused on each of the participating parties in turn, and what processes will lead to full commitment by all parties.

For each of the parties in the liaison project, the results of the interviews showed that barriers still exist to their participation, but that even at this stage each was making particular contributions to the dynamics of the relationships. The anticipated benefit of improved relationships between home and school of enhanced educational outcomes for Pacific Islands students is held by all parties.

Role of the Liaison Person

The central element, or role, is that of the liaison person/s who work to facilitate relationships between parents, students, and schools; that is why, in the proposed model, they are centrally positioned. They have to be aware of, or become quickly knowledgeable about, the barriers to participation that exist for each of the groups. Their role is also one of setting up opportunities for the groups to come together to focus on specific activities such as homework centres or a mentoring scheme. Their ability to involve all parties rests upon their understanding of the relative power and control experienced by each of the participants in the relationship. For example, if Pacific Islands parents are not comfortable entering schools or attending meetings, the liaison person needs to develop support strategies for the parents, perhaps through using the Samoan language or gathering a small group of parents together for mutual support.

Support for the liaison people came from 3 main sources: their management committees, their principals, and the Pacific Islands professional development contract. Some of the factors affecting levels of contribution to and participation by parents and teachers in the Pacific Islands liaison project include the supporting structures and the particular roles of the liaison person, the school principals and management, and the management committees of the cluster projects. A level of support is currently given by the Pacific Islands professional development initiative and the mentoring role of Lily Tuioti.

In the literature too, there is support for the employment of such people. For example, Hawk and Hill (1996) make the recommendation that "five fulltime liaison persons be employed in South Auckland schools" (p. 338).

Such paid positions were recommended by Ramsay et al. in 1981 in their report on South Auckland schools *Tomorrow May Be Too Late*. In the overseas literature Riley (1997) describes the role of such a person as an "expert co-constructor" particularly in the area of parent education and community-based social science research. Lareau and Shumar (1996) describe such people as "roving experts", and at the recent OECD conference held in Christchurch Eamon Stack, Chief

Inspector from the Department of Education and Science in Ireland, reporting on their home/school/community liaison scheme, outlined the key role of their liaison co-ordinators in developing and maintaining links between parents and schools.[2]

In the Pacific Islands liaison project all the parties interviewed said that the liaison person was essential to the running of the project because that was their sole focus and they were paid to complete a set of tasks. As a consequence, this meant teachers (and often Pacific Islands teachers if they were on the staff) could concentrate on their school roles while receiving support and information relevant to students and their families from the liaison person. Such information could assist the teachers in providing appropriate and relevant learning opportunities for the student.

Some of the liaison people requested more opportunity for professional development since after approximately 8 months in their positions they were better able to identify their needs in this area. However, time constraints are a factor, as one paired team wondered where they would find the time to do it.

Levels of Involvement

Levels of involvement by teachers, parents, students:

1. awareness/information
2. participation/contribution
3. analysis/reflection/commitment.

There are 3 dimensions to each party's abilities to contribute effectively to the home-school relationship. Firstly, there are the existing barriers to participation for each group. Secondly, there are the differing levels at which each can participate and contribute. These levels involve issues around relative power and control and the perceptions of each of the groups about the other's powers and respective roles. The third dimension describes the outcomes for each of groups or the motivation for engaging in home-school relationships. The outcomes for students are the primary focus of parents and teachers, but there are important outcomes for parents and teachers which need to be articulated.

The proposed model accounts for the levels of involvement that each party is able to reach or contribute to the project. It is proposed that each of the groups moves through the stages (awareness/information; participation/contribution; analysis/reflection/action) in sequence. The results from the interviews show that teachers need more information about Pacific Islands families and their role in the teaching and learning process as a basis for more appropriate interventions and school programmes. Teachers need encouragement to apply their knowledge (that is, to put it into practice), and then to analyse and reflect on why the intervention was or was not successful.

The success to date of the liaison people demonstrates how they have all moved through these levels of involvement, possibly several times over, as they were able to analyse and reflect upon the overall relationships and the roles and stages of the parents, students, and schools. It was

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[2] Ireland's nationally-funded scheme involves 176 schools and 107 co-ordinators at primary level and 84 secondary schools with 83 co-ordinators.

reported by the liaison people that Pacific Islands students increased their contributions and efforts when they became aware that their parents and schools were both committed to them and believed in their ability to learn. Although it is too early to find definite evidence, this could be very promising in terms of the academic outcomes for the students. A further interesting comment, made by one of the liaison people, was that Pacific Islands parents are aware of the inequalities—"that there is no level playing field"—but they have not really articulated that yet. There is some evidence, then, to say that parents are also moving through the levels of commitment as outlined in the proposed model.

Issues of Power and Control

Pacific Islands parents can become actively and purposefully involved in their children's learning. One example of positive outcomes for Pacific Islands parents is shown in the evaluation of the Anau Ako Pasifika home-based early childhood intervention (Mara, Morgan, Lund, Robertson, Watts, Enoka, & Lemisio, 1996). In this project Pacific Islands parents became active participants in their children's learning at home, through the support and resources provided by "home tutors" from their own Pacific Islands backgrounds.

Little evidence was collected by the researcher that demonstrates a substantial awareness or articulation, by any of the partners, of the issues of power and control, but the reflections of many of the liaison people show their growing awareness as they increase the level of facilitation between parents and teachers. It is probably also indicative that involvements are still in the initial stages where parents or teachers have not yet experienced conflict over curriculum issues or other priorities.

Potentially, issues of power and control need not become a problem or obstacle if they are articulated and openly and fully discussed. If all the parties are able to reach a level of mutual agreement about the respective roles of homes and families, of schools and teachers, and both recognise the reasons behind the differences in time commitment and resources they each contribute, then better outcomes for the children they share are achievable. The processes required to reach agreement will require sensitive and appropriate facilitation and negotiation skills on the part of someone such as a liaison person. Further, a valuing by each party of the other's contributions, whatever they end up to be in practical terms, is likely to facilitate the resolution of power and control issues between Pacific Islands parents and communities, and teachers and schools.

External Contexts

The Pacific Islands liaison project exists within a context which has its own specific dimensions. These include the schools' own history of relationships with Pacific Islands parents and communities and the kinds of initiatives that have been implemented in the past and their relative success. Schools that have built up a reputation over time of successful relationships start at a different point from those who have still much to do in this area. As at least one cluster in the study found, for example, having a track record and some consultative structures already in place greatly assisted their ability to develop a proposal for the liaison project and maintain consultation down the track.

The overall socioeconomic differences between Pacific Islands parents and the teachers in the

cluster schools are evident. However, it is not simply the difference between unemployment or shift work and full-time work but the values, priorities, and practices which go with these differing status-positions which is important. In such cases of inequality, the onus comes back on to the group perceived as having the higher status and ultimate control as the group which should take the initiative, to make the compromises, to be more flexible. As one liaison person suggested, it is up to schools to find ways for parents, teachers, and students to meet. Another made the point that schools must not isolate themselves from their communities, particularly Pacific Islands communities.

As stated previously, the Pacific Islands liaison project comes within the broader Pacific Islands Education Policy Plan, Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika, and the policies and targets laid down within that document (Ministry of Education, 1996b) and within other policy initiatives relating to Pacific Islands communities. Schools must also work within the wider national education policies and frameworks, so education policy is detailed on this model as part of the contexts within which relationships must be built and about which management committees need to be informed.

Funding and resourcing are ongoing issues for schools, and the question needs to be asked whether schools would or could be able to implement fully the kind of model which is proposed from this project without receiving extra or targeted funding in order to do so. The largest area of cost is really the time that is required by liaison people to establish and maintain relationships. In terms of community development, to be able to have momentary "failures" that are able to be overcome is what in the end will produce positive and successful home-school relationships. Given the levels of complexity outlined in the model, there are bound to be initiatives trialled that may not work, but the lessons learnt could ultimately enhance the outcomes for parents, teachers, and students. The success of any intervention with Pacific Islands communities must be based on an understanding and appreciation of these differences and a willingness to accept this diversity as a strength rather than a "problem".

A further contextual consideration is the complex area of intra-group and inter-group differences and the relationship of this diversity to the wider dominant values of society as reproduced by our schooling system. Within this broad dimension in the model it must be remembered that "Pacific Islands" encompasses a range of different groups with their own histories, languages, values, priorities, and practices. There are families who have second, third, fourth generations who were born in New Zealand and there are also the "new arrivals". There are the youth and peer cultures within which young people are growing up, resulting in many cases in a wide gap between generations.

Any accessible and useful model must take into account not only both the levels and the nature of the complexity which is characteristic of home-school relationships but also the question of timing and time dedicated to making relationships work, which is of the utmost importance. In the Hawk and Hill study schools reported that "Homework programmes have been available in some of the AIMHI schools but in some programmes attendance was low so they were terminated" (1996, p. 337). It would be interesting to find out more about the timing, the location, and the nature of parent and teacher involvement in such an initiative to see if timing was a deciding factor there.

There is evidence to suggest that already the clusters are realising how little control they actually have over some of these factors (for example, funding and timing). Others, such as cross-cultural priorities, can come more under the schools' control or direction, but their very

complexity requires time and resources to engage in with any depth. All of these contexts—history, socioeconomic differences, policy, funding, cultural diversity, timing— impact in various ways on the relationships and elements already detailed in this explanation. The important influences and implications of these contexts have come through clearly in the results and have already been raised as issues in this discussion.

In summary then the proposed model has been useful in analysing the results of this evaluation and in identifying some of the emerging issues. It could become more useful in a more comprehensive and wider evaluation of the Pacific Islands liaison project that could be undertaken in the future.

In addition it is hoped that the proposed model and references from the literature may give some starting points for schools to enhance more effective delivery of programmes for improving liaison between schools and their Pacific Islands communities.

What this study has not been able to demonstrate, is what would be effective for the different Pacific Islands communities. However, there remains the challenge for schools to get to know the individuals of the Tongan, Samoan, Cook Islands, Niuean, and other Pacific Islands parents and communities represented in their schools, rather than relying on a set of generalisations which may or may not apply in their particular situation.

Recommendations

1. That the assistance should be given to first-time contractees of contracts meeting the educational needs of Pacific Islands students and families through each stage of the tendering and contract development process;

2. That the schools in the project would find it helpful if the Ministry of Education appointed "case workers" for projects and clusters of schools to provide consistency of ongoing support and information to contractees;

3. That the Ministry of Education develop some co-ordination of targeted funding initiatives and contracts for schools or clusters of schools with Pacific Islands students such as could occur through a case worker, where schools are implementing a number of such initiatives;

4. That the Ministry of Education take into account that projects such as the Pacific Islands liaison project require longer time periods than most current contracts allow in order to develop effective (and fully evaluated) strategies and to strengthen sufficiently the relationships between teachers, parents, and students that will lead to significant enhancement of achievement levels of Pacific Islands students;

5. That clusters of schools in the Pacific Islands liaison project should be encouraged to make or extend their links with providers of early childhood education in their areas and incorporate transition-to-school initiatives into their projects;

6. That schools with Pacific Islands students consider using the proposed model in this report, and the achievements to date of this project, as a resource to develop their own initiatives to improve their home-school relationships for improved outcomes for these students;

7. That a more extensive and inclusive evaluation of the Pacific Islands liaison project would be useful towards the end of the project's term. A follow-up study could evaluate the proposed model and explore other important issues and aspects of the evaluation that were not possible in the present study.

Conclusion

It is unlikely that a model or models could be developed that would ever totally account for or embrace the many levels and complexities of the relationships, the contexts, issues of timing, and the levels of involvement that is the Pacific Islands liaison project. The holistic view that anything is greater than the sum of all its parts is applicable here. The interviews and the literature review and the responses to the research questions and the recommendations that make up this report constitute, it is hoped, steps towards the ultimate goal of raising levels of educational achievement for Pacific Islands students in Aotearoa-New Zealand into the next century.

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APPENDIX 1

Questions for parents' and teachers' groups:

1. Do you think you have been kept informed about the development of the Pacific Islands Liaison Project (PILP) operating in your school?

   ☐ a) Yes ☐ b) No

   (Note for recorder: Record all views here in detail. If appropriate, rate the collective view. This method applies to all of the following questions: 2,7,9,10,11,12,13)

2. How well-informed do you feel about the PILP and what it is trying to achieve?

   ☐ a) Very well informed ☐ b) Quite well informed ☐ c) Not very much ☐ d) Not at all

3. From your experience with the Project: what is working well?
4. How could the schools do it differently?
5. **(Teachers only)** How have students been helped by this project?—please specify.

   (Parents only) How have your children been helped by this project?

6. How have parents been helped by this project?
7. The Project has been operating across a number of schools. How much involvement have you had with parents/teachers from other schools?

   ☐ a) A great deal ☐ b) Some ☐ c) A little ☐ d) None at all

8. Are there reasons for this involvement/lack of involvement?
9. Since the project began have you felt more involved with the school and students?

   ☐ a) Yes ☐ b) No

   If yes, in what ways?

10. **(Teachers only)** How helpful is it having a Liaison person/people to co-ordinate the project?

    (Parents only) How much has the Liaison person helped you and other parents become involved in the school?

    ☐ a) Extremely helpful ☐ b) Helpful ☐ c) Partially helpful ☐ d) Not helpful

    If helpful, in what ways has the Liaison person helped?—please describe.

11. **(Teachers only)** Has this project involved more parents in the school?

☐ a) Yes ☐ b) No

If yes, in what ways?

12. Has this project got the Pacific Islands students, parents, and the community more involved with the school?

☐ a) Yes ☐ b) No

If yes, in what ways?

13. Has this project led to any benefits for the Pacific Islands students?

☐ a) Yes ☐ b) No

If yes, what are the main benefits for Pacific Islands students?

14. What parts of this project could be improved upon?

15. Any other comments you would like to make about the Pacific Islands Liaison Project?

Thank you very much for your time and participation in this group interview. The information collected will be of benefit to other schools with Pacific Islands students and families.

Kia ora! Fakaaue lahi! Malo 'aupito! Kia orana! Soifua, Fa'afetai lava!

APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions for Liaison People

These questions and the responses recorded have no bearing on the performance of the interviewee and on ongoing employment in the Project. Information gathered will only be used to contribute to the wider picture and to the development of models for other schools with Pacific Islands students. Your name will not be recorded on the notes from this interview.

1. Can you describe what your personal goals were when you offered yourself for this liaison position?

2. What different ways/approaches have you used in getting parents/communities and schools to work together?

3. What kinds of activities, projects, or opportunities have you created and put into place to improve communication between the students, schools, and the parents/communities? What has worked well/not worked well? What could be the reasons for this?

4. From what sources have you gained most help and strength during the project a) from within the school and the management and b) outside the community?

5. From what sources have you gained the most challenges during the project a) from within the school and the management and b) outside the community?

6. What strategies/measures/indicators have you used to measure whether you have met your objectives or not?

7. What have been the difficulties and the benefits of the different activities/projects/ opportunities facilitated by you?

8. What have been the benefits for students as a result of your work?

9. What have been the benefits for parents/communities as a result of your work?

10. What have been the benefits for teachers as a result of your work?

11. What have been the advantages, for you, of working in a cluster or grouping of schools?

12. What have been the disadvantages, for you, of working in a cluster or grouping of schools?

13. Do these advantages/disadvantages also apply to the schools working in clusters?

14. What have you learnt about yourself in the course of implementing the Pacific Island Liaison Project, that you would like to share with other schools?

15. What have you learnt about home-school relationships and how these are built up, that you could share with other schools?